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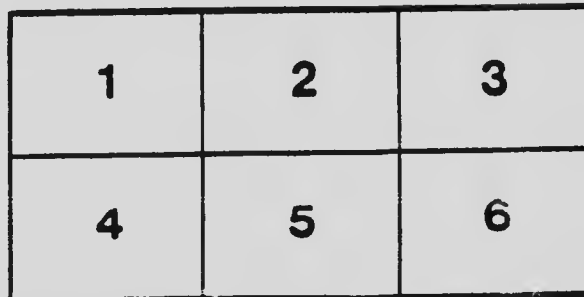
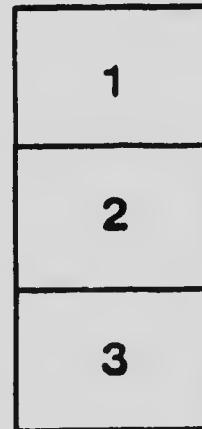
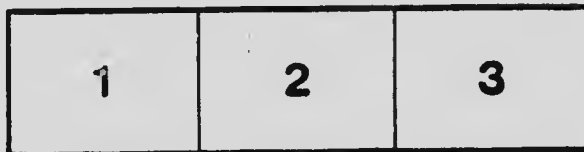
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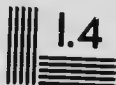
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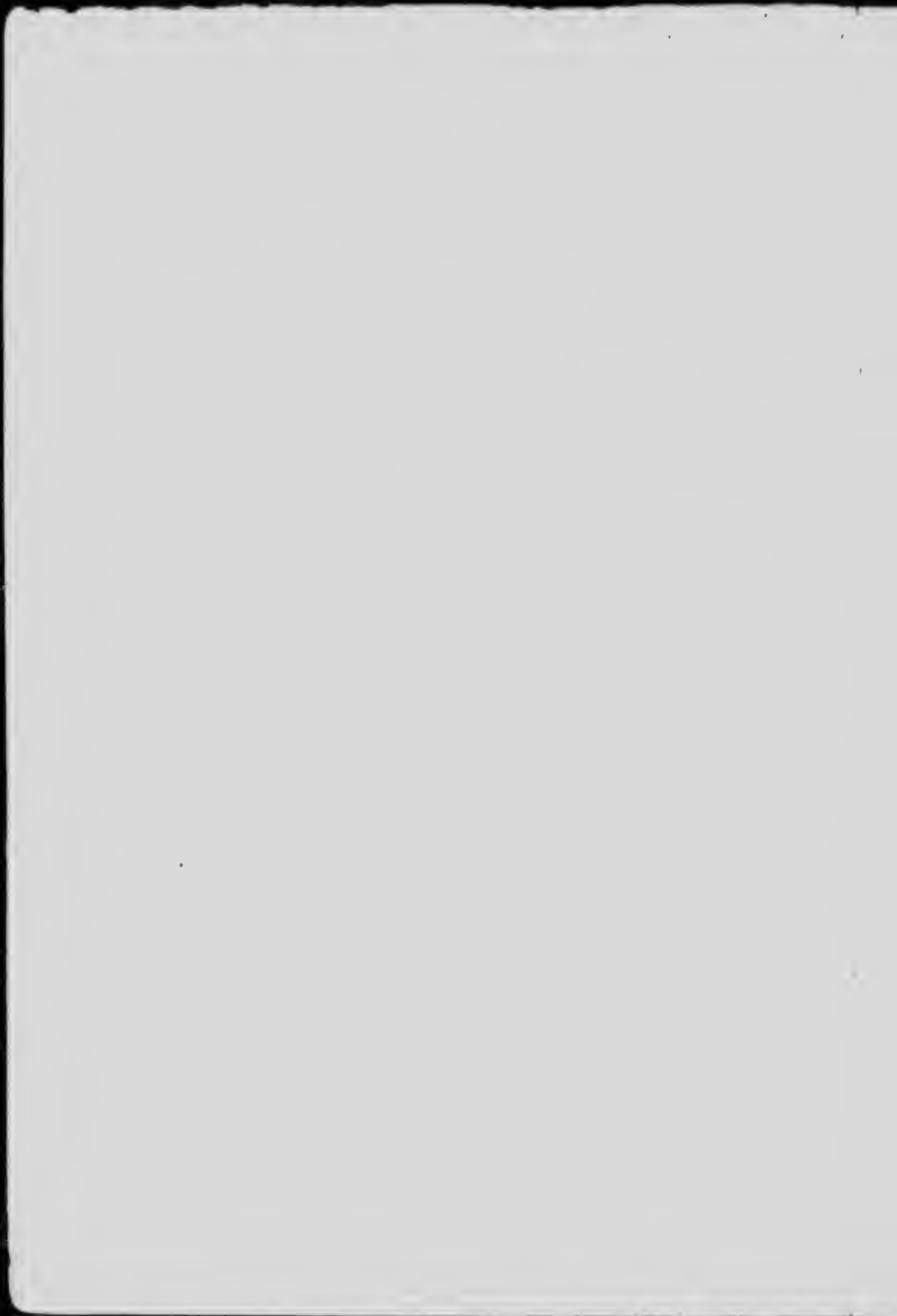
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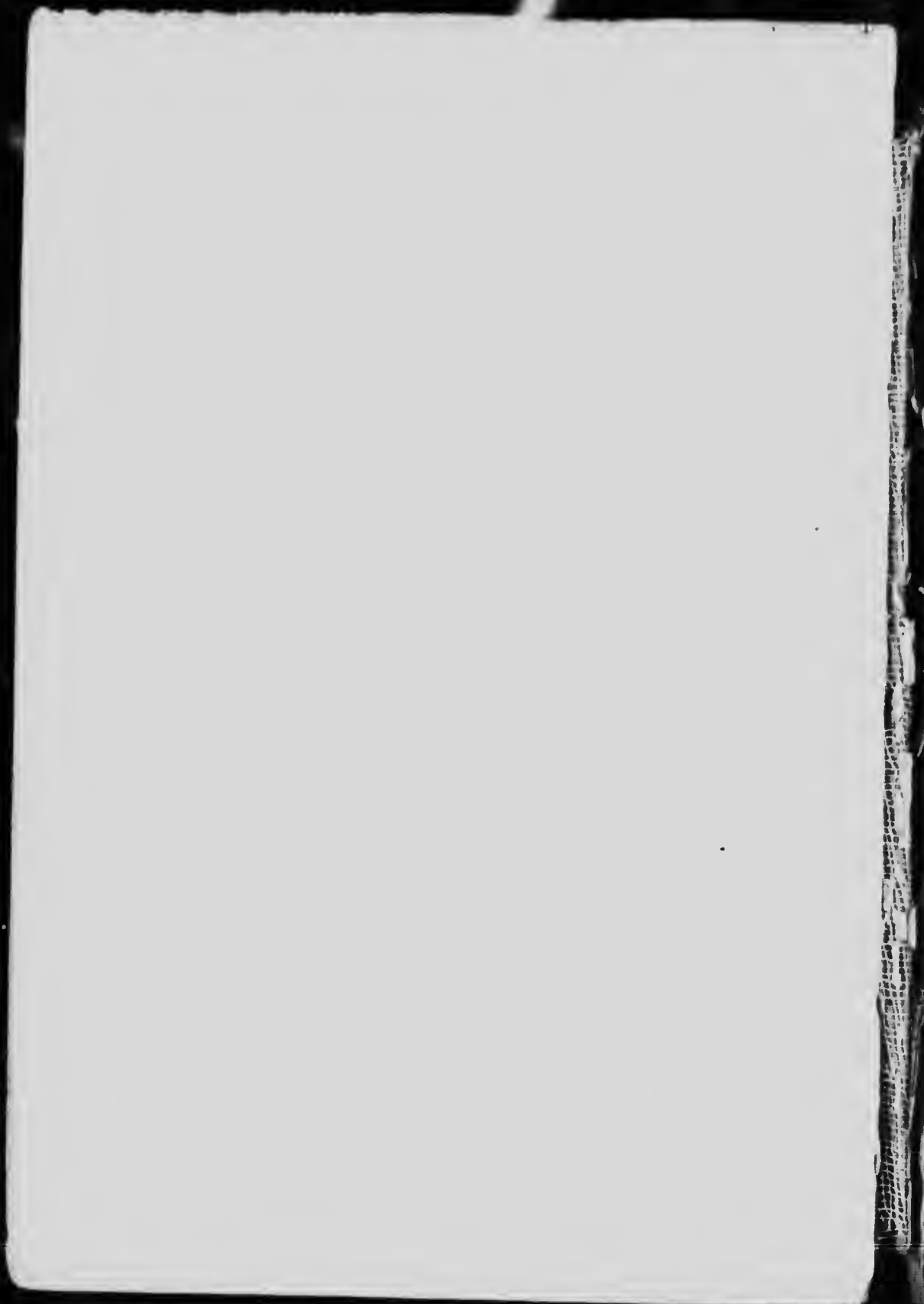
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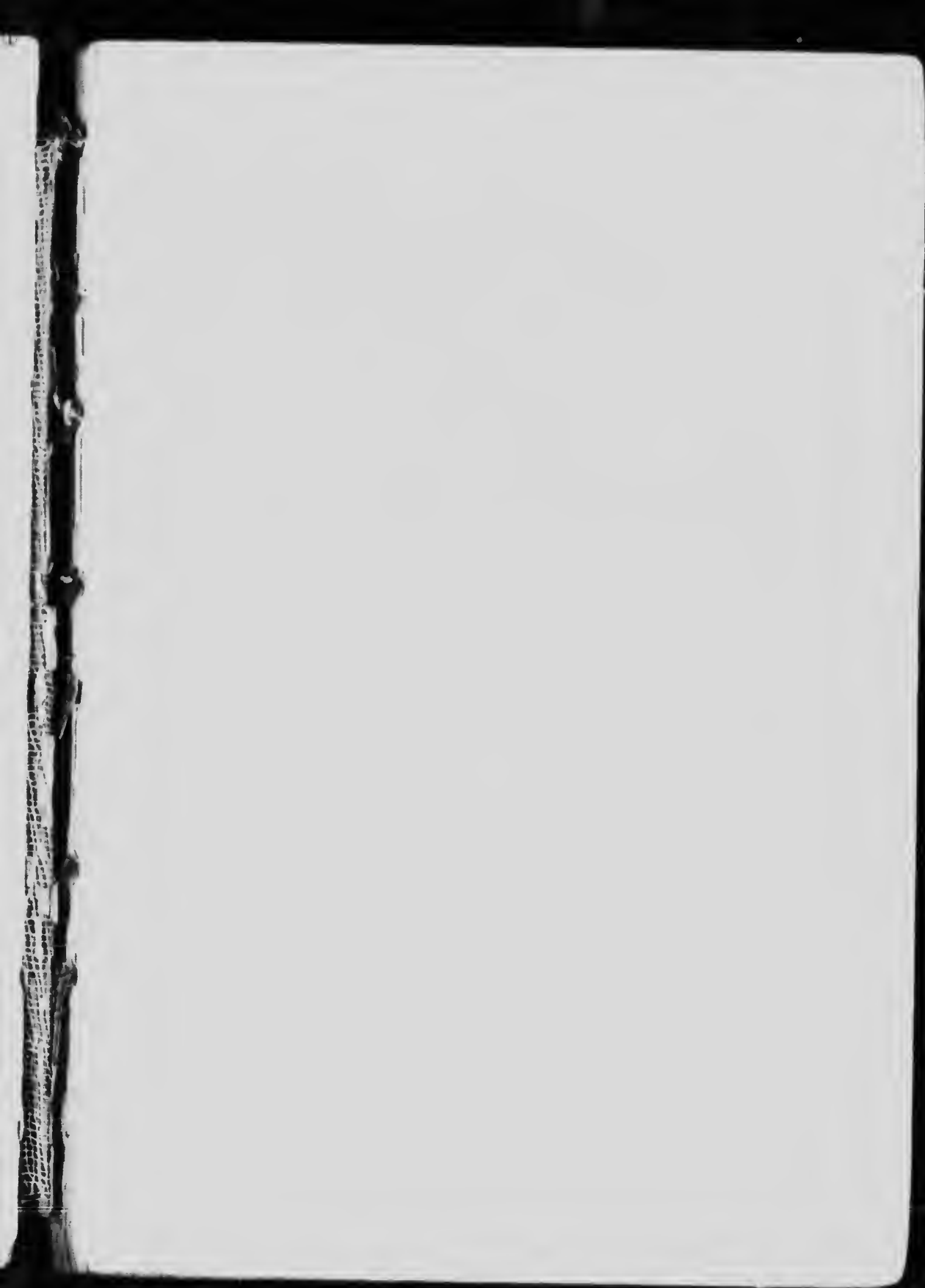
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THE MINISTER OF POLICE







Hansini Boulli

"Monsieur—a moment, there is some one at the door"

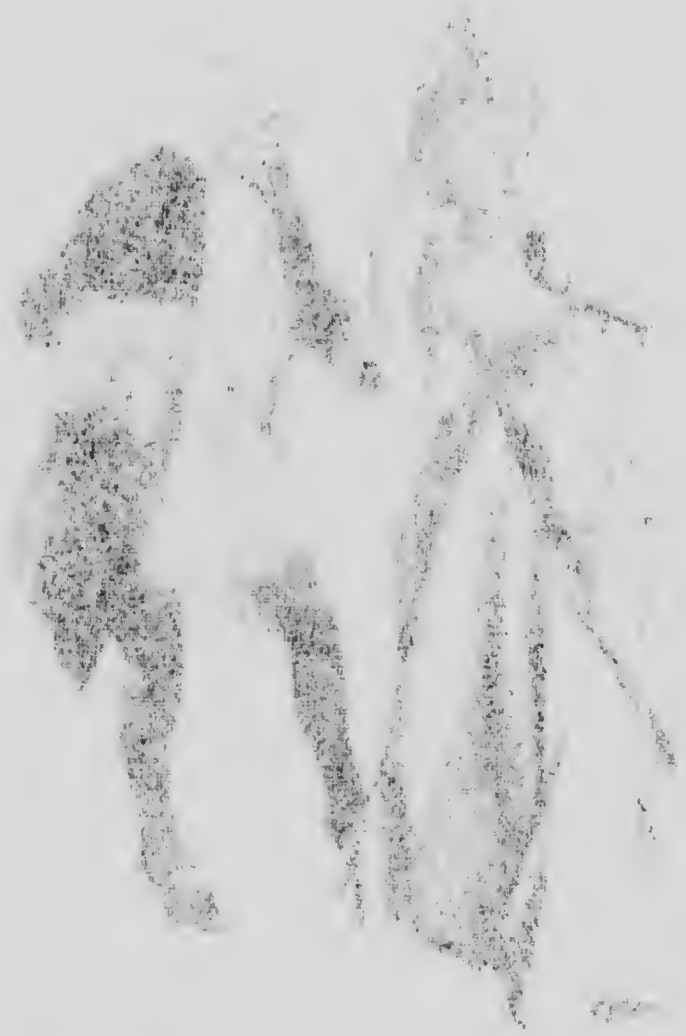
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THE
MINISTER OF POLICE

By
HENRY MOUNTJOY

ILLUSTRATED BY
HANSON BOOTH

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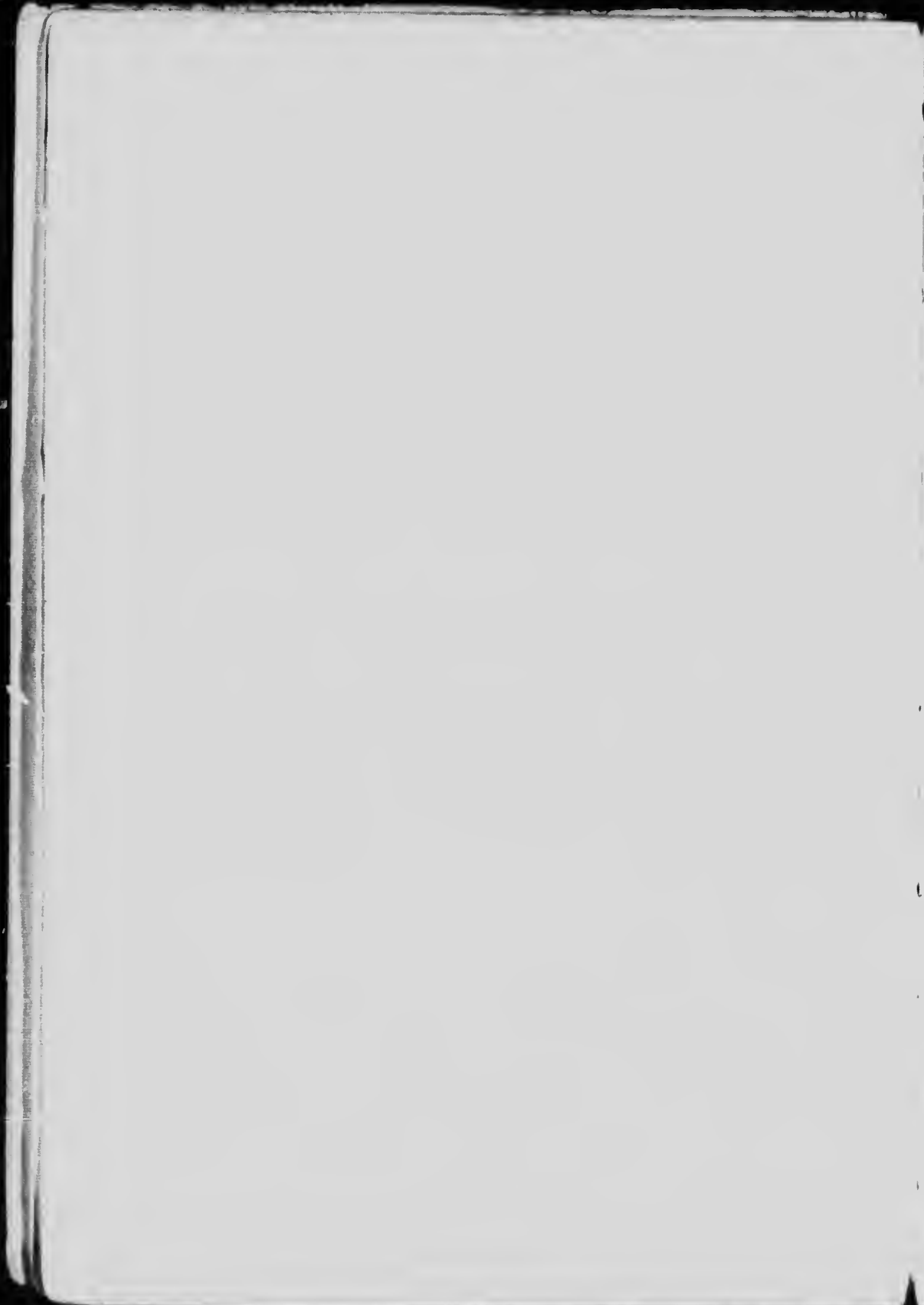
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PART I



THE MINISTER OF POLICE

CHAPTER I

THE FIFTEENTH LOUIS

ONE evening in May, just at that chill hour when the trees are draping themselves in the muslin of the evening mist, the carriage of Monsieur de Sartines passed the Swiss on guard at the gates of his majesty's palace of Versailles and entered the courtyard.

Then, as now, this courtyard, vast, paved with cobblestones big as one's fist, looked on by rows and rows of windows; chill, almost repellent, gave one the impression of a back premises, without any deduction from that other impression of magnificence which the genius of Mansard mixed in the plans, the bricks and the very mortar of his work.

The carriage of the minister of police, having crossed the courtyard where other carriages were standing in waiting, stopped at the main entrance of the palace, and Monsieur de Sartines descended.

A lackey in the royal livery came down the steps and stood as the vehicle drew up, and already the man at the swing doors had passed the words across his shoulder to the usher at his desk, "The carriage of Monsieur de Sartines."

The carriages of the notabilities of France, of Monsieur de Coigny, the Duc de Richelieu, the Duc de Choiseul and a host of others were known individually and almost by the sound of their wheels to the doorkeepers of Versailles, and none better than that of the minister of police, who was now ascending the steps walking heavily—a magnificent figure of a man in a coat of brocaded silk, with ruffles of the finest Mechlin lace, bearing in his hand a clouded cane, and at his side that dress sword, an heirloom of the family of the Comtes de Sartines, inherited from the illustrious Maréchal d'Ancre.

The glass doors opening before him, as though pushed aside by his reflection on their polished surfaces, Monsieur de Sartines passed into the warm and flower-scented vestibule where the lamps had just been lighted, and where Jaquin, the usher on duty, advanced to receive the hat and cane of the minister.

From beyond the Stairway of the Ambassadors, somewhere in the distance, faint, like the diffused

murmur of bees, came the sound of voices, a multitude of voices subdued and low-pitched, a nimbus of sound from the Hall of Mirrors, where the courtiers in attendance were assembled, chatting, criticizing the *rite* of the day, drawn together by no special occasion, or reason, save that which makes insects huddle toward light and warmth.

There was no necessity for Monsieur de Sartines to inquire whether the king were present in his palace; the voices from the Hall of Mirrors told him.

He was advancing up the great staircase when from the corridor above, descending, Monsieur le Maréchal Duc de Richelieu made his appearance, coming rapidly, seeming elated and well pleased with himself, and followed by a lackey of the palace bearing a despatch-box.

A marvelous figure was the Duc de Richelieu, quite youthful still, despite his seventy-four years, small in stature, yet somehow great, a man with the past of a conqueror and the present appearance—at a distance—of a youthful fop.

At this moment the hero of Mahon was at the zenith of his worldly hopes, for the De Choiseul ministry, destined to fall on the following Christmas eve, was crumbling, and the De Richelieu ministry—never to materialize—was in the air.

"Ah, De Sartines," said the duc, pausing in his passage toward the door, and laying a finger on the brocaded arm of the new-comer, "you have come to pay your respects to his majesty. You will find him very well. I have just left him, and he is expecting you."

"Expecting me, Monsieur?" replied De Sartines. "Then his majesty must have been suddenly gifted with the power of second sight."

"*Ma foi*, who can tell? I only know he said to me, 'I feel in such good spirits something surely is going to happen; either some pamphleteer is printing a new pamphlet against me, or Monsieur de Sartines is coming to bore me with a portfolio.'"

De Sartines bowed gravely. "Happily for you, Monsieur, his majesty said to me at our last meeting, 'Whatever happens, I shall never bore Monsieur de Richelieu in that way.'"

De Richelieu, almost assured, and already feeling the portfolio of the Duc de Choiseul under his arm, laughed and passed on, while De Sartines took a step upward, only to be stopped again, this time by a figure just emerging from the corridor.

It was Monsieur de Joyeuse, a young gentleman who had squandered a fortune and was now squandering the fortune of his wife, a woman of fifty-

eight whom he had married—openly confessing the fact—for her money.

He was bearing a small bunch of violets. "Why, it is Monsieur de Sartines!" said De Joyeuse. "How opportune! You have come just in time to save the remains of your reputation, which they are killing in the Hall of Mirrors."

"Ah, Monsieur," replied De Sartines, "you are happier in that respect than I am."

"And how?"

"You have left nothing for them to kill."

He bowed, passed on, and a moment later found himself in the throng crowding the great salon.

The lamps were lighted, but through the long windows, as yet uncurtained, the park, the lakes and the fountains of Versailles showed, a dim and poetic picture in the chiaroscuro of evening.

The courtiers were formed in little groups chatting together, laughing and discussing trifles as though they had been matters of state, which, indeed, in that epoch they often were. Near the doorway by which De Sartines had entered, the Comte d'Harlancourt, a tall man with a severe and villainous-looking face—of whom it was said that, at his instigation, his wife had poisoned her first husband—had buttonholed the young Comte de Coigny and

was holding him in talk, while Monsieur de Stenlis and another gentleman stood by listening and laughing.

"Ah, De Sartines," cried this nobleman, releasing De Coigny and turning to the new-comer, "what a delightful surprise to find you at Versailles! And how is Justice?"

"Very well, indeed, Monsieur," replied the minister, with a freezing smile; "she was even asking after you this morning." He passed on, still making his way through the crowd, speaking a word to this gentleman, nodding to that. He had not made twenty paces when suddenly, as if at the touch of a wand, silence fell on the Hall of Mirrors, and a voice said: "Monsieur de la Vrillière."

It was the king's voice. He had just opened the door of his cabinet, and De Sartines saw the Duc de la Vrillière pass in. He drew close to the door and waited. He had not to wait long—in a moment it opened again and the duc appeared. The king's hand was resting upon his arm, detaining him a moment for a last word. Then his majesty released him, glanced round at the people, saw De Sartines and made a face. The minister of police took the grimace as an invitation to enter the cabinet, and did so. The king had been writing. On the desk table,

lighted by four rose-colored candles burning in silver candelabra, lay a mass of correspondence. This lazy monarch, who had cultivated idleness as a fine art, and of whom it may be said, at least, that he could do nothing well, had his fits of activity, from one of which he seemed now convalescing, for he yawned as he took his place in the chair by the desk and motioned his visitor to a fauteuil.

"Well, Monsieur de Sartines," said the king, "and how are we this evening—charmingly, I hope?"

"Charmed, at least, your Majesty, to escape for a moment from the dullness of the Hôtel de Sartines and exchange its darkness for the sun of Versailles."

"And is it Monsieur de Sartines or the minister of police that I see before me?"

"Both, Sire. Monsieur de Sartines to inquire after your Majesty's health, the minister of police to inform your Majesty of the health of his people."

"And how are our dear people?" asked his majesty, casting some specks of gold sand off a sheet of note-paper and folding the sheet.

"Still grumbling, Sire."

"And the pamphleteers?"

"Still writing, Sire."

"And the philosophers?"

"Still philosophizing, your Majesty."

“And the price of corn?—for it always seems to me that the price of corn is at the bottom of all our troubles.”

“Still rising, Sire.”

“Good!” said the king. The word escaped from him almost without his knowing it. It was, all the same, meant; for the king and Monsieur de Sartines had between them an interest in the price of corn—they were, in fact, partners, in that they had bought up all the available grain and stored it in granaries. They would presently sell at an enormous profit. Meanwhile, the conspirators, with their eyes on the market, maintained toward one another a dignified silence on the matter, the king quite content to leave the business details entirely in the hands of his minister.

“Good!” said he again. “With the people and the markets in this disturbed state it is a satisfaction to remember that we have a De Sartines at the ministry of police to deal with our philosophers and pamphleteers, who are always grumbling at the state of France, and our people, who are always grumbling about their food. *Ma foi*, Monsieur de Sartines, why do you not feed all these troublesome subjects of mine?”

“With what, your Majesty?”

“With the philosophers. Then the pamphleteers

could write pamphlets on the subject, and all would be peace."

"Oh, Sire," replied De Sartines; "they would never swallow Monsieur Rousseau's coat, nor that hat, which covers, no doubt, a multitude of things other than his thoughts. He grows more disreputable-looking day by day, as he sits there at the Café de Régence, playing dominoes with his right hand and spreading sedition with his left. That old man, Sire, gives me more troublous thoughts than all the other sedition-mongers in a bundle. That old man, a young man and a woman have been in my carriage with me all the way from Paris this evening."

"Monsieur Rousseau in your carriage!"

"I spoke metaphorically, Sire."

"And the young man and woman—were they also with you metaphorically?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Who, then, is the young man?"

"The Chevalier de Lussac, your Majesty."

"Ah! De Richelieu's kinsman—and the woman?"

"The Baroness Sophie Linden, with whom the chevalier is in love, Sire, at least so my agents say."

"The Austrian woman?"

"Yes, your Majesty, the same; accredited by the court of Vienna, bearing a letter for the dauphiness, lingering on in Paris now that her work is over."

"And do you not know why she is lingering in Paris, Monsieur de Sartines?"

"That, Sire, is what I am determined to find out."

"I can tell you."

"You can, Sire?"

"*Ma foi*, yes; you yourself have just told me—she is in love with the chevalier." The king laughed as though he had made a good joke. But De Sartines did not laugh.

"That is all very well, Sire. I was not referring to love—it does not come within the province of the minister of police. What does come within his province is the fact that at her house in the Rue Coq Héron she receives dubious people. Messengers call there with letters; De Lussac, kinsman though he is to the Duc de Richelieu, is, I am assured, a member of that infernal Society of the Midi, and up to his eyes in the new movement that threatens to subvert order and destroy the state."

"He is a very young man."

"Your Majesty," said De Sartines earnestly, "the two most important enemies of the state are the very old men who are filled with old rigid ideas they can not get rid of, and the very young men who are filled with new fantastical ideas they can not digest."

"Which reminds me, Monsieur," said the king,

“that I am suffering from indigestion; the politics of the present day are a stew made by the politicians of the past—they were bad cooks. If you attempt to swallow it you will get indigestion, as I have done. Let us leave it to the politicians of the future. Look after De Lussac and his friends as much as you please. For me they are like madame’s marmosets; they chatter and chatter and scratch each other’s heads. Let them chatter, as long as they don’t chatter too loud and disturb our peace.”

The king moved in his chair to indicate that the interview was over, and De Sartines, knowing his majesty better than his majesty knew himself, judged that he was now bored sufficiently for his purpose. He rose, bowed, and taking a paper from his pocket placed it on the table.

It was a *lettre de cachet* in blank.

“Your Majesty’s wish is law, and now, Sire, on a matter of police, may I ask your signature to this?”

The king glanced at the paper, made a face, took a pen, tested the nib, and signed.

“Here is your weapon, dear De Sartines; only don’t let it bring Monsieur le Maréchal growling to me because his kinsman has been given apartments at Vincennes, or in our fortress of the Bastille, without a cause.”

"I never act without a cause, Sire."

"True—it is your affair. But remember, also, De Sartines, that Madame la Baronne is sacred—as far as her person; she is accredited to us in a way."

"Oh, your Majesty," replied De Sartines, putting sand on the paper, "you may be sure that I am circumspect in all my dealings with ladies. Have you ever known me, Sire, to cross my sword with a fan in the open? I never approach a lady of rank in my business, except through one of those three avenues which a woman keeps open for her ruin."

"And those three avenues are—?"

"Her lover, her maid and her milliner, Sire."

De Sartines, seeming greatly pleased with himself, folded the paper, placed it in his pocket, and bowing profoundly, advanced backward to the door. The door seemed to open of its own accord as this deft courtier and perfect nobleman, bowing again, made a half-turn and movement of the hand that brought him outside it, face fronting the crowd in the Hall of Mirrors, and with the door of the king's cabinet closed behind him.

The crowd divided before him as he made his way to the vestibule. Here he received his hat and cane from Jaquin. Then, getting into his carriage and

drawing his robe of marten fur about him, he gave the word to his coachman—"Paris."

He did not tell his majesty that only the day before the police had raided the head office of the Society of the Midi, arresting Messieurs Barthelmy and Conflans, not to speak of twenty other more insignificant persons, and finding among the papers of the society hints indicating that the Chevalier de Lussac was implicated in the doings of this, the third most important revolutionary society in Paris.

His majesty was not in the mood for domestic politics at the present moment, an attitude of mind not disagreeable to the minister, as his majesty was disposed in these matters to bear toward leniency.

CHAPTER II

THE COMPLAINT OF LAVENNE

AS THE carriage of Monsieur de Sartines pursued the road to Paris the minister took from a Russia leather portfolio some papers, and by the light of a little lamp fixed in the side of the carriage began to examine them.

They were the "Papers of the Day," that is to say, the chief and most important papers relative to the police work of Paris and France during the last twenty-four hours: reports from agents, a letter from the governor of Vincennes, a report from Monsieur de Launay, governor of the Bastile, on the condition of the state prisoner supposed to be dying; a copy of a *ballade* against himself seized from a street hawker; papers relating to the little and the great, to the man in the embroidered coat and the man in rags, all of which he shuffled and arranged as a dexterous player shuffles and arranges his cards. Chief among these papers were the notes referring to the Society of the Midi and the men who had been already arrested.

THE COMPLAINT OF LAVENNE 15

In five minutes he had fixed the contents of all these papers in his mind in proper sequence, and returning all but two of them to the portfolio, held these only in his hand. One of them related to the doings of a woman during the last two days, the other to the doings of a man, and had you wished to examine for yourself the thoroughness of Monsieur de Sartines' methods and the methods of his agents, you could not have done better than to have read across his shoulder this closely written report concerning the woman.

"At nine o'clock her carriage stopped at the door of her house, Number 12 Rue Coq Héron; it was the same carriage which she always uses for ordinary affairs such as shopping, etc., hired from Vaudrin in the Rue de la Harpe. It waited for twenty minutes. At twenty minutes past nine she appeared, dressed for walking, and entered her carriage, which drove to the shop of Monsieur Boehmer in the Rue Royale. Here it stopped. Madame got out," etc. The whole report was signed "Gaussin, agent", and it related to no less a person than the Baroness Sophie Linden.

De Sartines read it with impatience, placed it in the portfolio with the other papers, and turned to the paper relating to the affairs of the man.

This report was quite short, tersely written and to the point. It pleased him evidently. It was signed "Lavenne, agent", and the man who was the subject of it was no less a person than the Comte Jean Armand de Lussac.

Then Monsieur de Sartines, placing this paper in the portfolio with the others, extinguished the little lamp, drew his furs about him, and sat in the darkness of the carriage which was bearing him rapidly to Paris.

It was now night, and the trees by the roadside, dimly lighted by a half-moon rising in the eastern sky, showed up darkly against the silvery mists of the fields.

At the toll-gate the carriage did not stop, but passed at full speed and on through the streets of Paris, splashing the passers with mud; heedless of children, dogs, pedestrians who wished to cross the way; a perfect representation of the government whose minister it contained. The streets through which it was now passing were badly lighted by oil lamps, badly paved, filthy with refuse and mud, narrow, and like the streets and passages one passes through in bad dreams. Poverty and hunger walked here in rags, not as spectral figures, but figures of flesh and blood. Frightful faces were to be seen,

spectral faces, pitiable faces, men in tatters, women in rags. Infinite squalor! In these poor streets all men and all women seemed bent, like those trees we see on sea-coasts, by a bleak wind always blowing from the same quarter, bent and stunted by the pressure of some heavy and chilling hand. Splashing these with the mud of its wheels drove the carriage of Monsieur de Sartines, its occupant curled, scented, dressed more gorgeously than the lilies of the field, gazing through the windows on the people he passed as Jove might gaze on mortals.

The carriage crossed the poorer part of the city, making for the Faubourg St. Germain, where at the gateway of a large mansion they turned in, crossed the courtyard and drew up at the steps.

It was the Hôtel de Sartines.

The footman opening the door, the minister of police descended, went up the steps and passing the saluting guards at the doorway entered the great hall, whence he took his way by a flight of deeply-carpeted stairs to his official bureau on the first floor.

This room, still haunted by the shade of Monsieur d'Ombreval, deserves a word of mention. Here the police-political business of the state was conducted; here the attainted noblemen, the common forger, the suspect, the man being persecuted, and the man pur-

sued came face to face with the man in power. From here men went to Vincennes or the Bastile or death.

The room was octagonal, with a polished parquet floor; fauteuils stood about, for it was used by the minister as a chamber of audience as well as an official bureau; it was lighted by wax candles burning in silver sconces, and opposite the door stood the famous bureau with a hundred compartments and secret drawers, once the property of his predecessor. A square table, half covered by a cloth of green silk, stood near the bureau; on it were some despatches that had just arrived and which De Sartines examined while waiting for the agent Gaussin, for whom he had sent.

He was standing reading, like this, when the door opened and the agent appeared.

Gaussin was a big man with a head that made one think of the head of a horse; he had a long face and only one expression. He was less a man than a machine.

De Sartines turned, received his subordinate's salute, and taking the report from the small portfolio he had placed on the bureau, said: "You wrote this?"

The cautious Gaussin approached before commit-

ting himself as if to examine the paper, but his master waved him back.

"*Peste!* it is yours—the report on Madame la Baronne Linden. The day before yesterday I said to you: 'Follow this woman closely, get into her house if you can, examine her papers if possible, and if possible intercept any correspondence between her and the Comte de Lussac.' How have you done this?"

"Monsieur," said Gaussin, without moving a muscle of his face, "since you gave me the order I have adhered to Madame la Baronne like a plaster—"

"Put on by a quack or a fool."

"Monsieur—"

"Silence."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"You have found out nothing—"

"Monsieur, there was nothing to find."

"You waste your ink and paper on every little trifling detail. I said get into her house if possible—"

"And I tried, Monsieur."

"How?—through a window?"

"No, Monsieur: through a pretty servant-maid."

"And you failed."

Gaussin scratched his chin.

"Not exactly failed, Monsieur."

"Then you did get in?"

"No, Monsieur. She pushed me out with a broom, and the servant Placide, an old scoundrel with a white beard, locked the door in my face. But tonight I will court her again. I have thought of a new method. This time I shall get in."

"You will not. You are dismissed from the case. Take up something simpler. Go report yourself to Monsieur Beauregard, and order Lavenne to be sent to me."

Gaussin saluted, turned, and left the room, while De Sartines, grumbling to himself, went on reading his despatches.

He had finished them and had placed them on the table when three raps on the door, given by the usher's wand, introduced Lavenne.

Lavenne was a young-looking man with the pale face and jet-black hair one finds among the men of the south; he had eyes dark and luminous, possessing that brilliancy of the cornea, that sparkle and glitter, which almost invariably is found in men of high intelligence. His features were mobile, changing in expression, seeming to betray his inmost feelings and thoughts; thus giving him an appearance of ingenuousness that was as fictitious as his appearance of youth.

"Ah, Lavenne," said the minister of police, "you have come. I have received your report, and you are not making much progress, it seems to me."

"Monsieur," said Lavenne, "I have not had much time."

"You have had three days."

"Oh, Monsieur," replied Lavenne, "in a woman's affairs what are three days? A creature who takes three hours to buy a hat, who takes an hour to write a letter which means nothing, and a moment to put a postscript which means everything—"

"But, *cordieu!*" cried De Sartines, "there is no woman in the question. I told you to watch the Comte de Lussac, to intercept his letters, and you come prattling to me of a woman!"

"Monsieur, I have watched him. You say, Monsieur, that there is no woman in the question. Do you not know, Monsieur, that the comte is in love?"

"I know there is an affair between him and that Austrian woman. Though, from what I can make out, they have never been alone together, he follows her like a poodle—"

"Monsieur, it is more than an 'affair'. He is in love with her to the hilt. To watch him it is also necessary to watch her, and to watch her, if Monsieur will permit me to say so, requires better eyes than the eyes of a blind horse."

"You have some meaning behind that expression?" asked De Sartines, looking fixedly at the agent.

"Monsieur, I have more than a meaning. I have a complaint."

"A complaint?"

"Yes, Monsieur. Three days ago you said to me, 'I put you on the case of the Comte de Lussac. He is a conspirator against the established order, a friend of Rousseau's, a member, I suspect, of the Society of the Midi. Watch him like a cat; use what methods you will, but bring me evidence that he belongs to the society. Bring me evidence, evidence, evidence'—those were your words, Monsieur. I took up the case in my own way, and before I had been working twelve hours I found that I was being hampered by a blind horse you had let into the case. I refer to Gaussin."

"Go on," said De Sartines, greatly incensed by this criticism of his methods coming from an inferior, but restraining his temper.

"Before I had been working twelve hours I found this blunderer poking his nose into my business, hanging on the skirts of Madame la Baronne, following her carriage, and, to crown his stupidity, trying to make love to her maid and being received with a

broom and a bucket of cold water which Placide, her man-servant, flung over him. The result, Monsieur, is that as nearly as possible the affair has been spoiled."

"Anything more?"

"Only this, Monsieur—Gaussin is an excellent man for the arrest of market porters or pickpockets, but in an affair of this sort he is out of place."

The truth in these words did not at all abate the anger of De Sartines at the criticism of his own judgment which they contained, but, so completely master of himself was he that he showed nothing of his feelings in the expression of his face; his manner only altered; it became freezing. He glanced at the clock on the mantel, paused for a moment as if he had thought, and then said, speaking slowly and distinctly: "It is now twenty-five minutes past nine, Monday, the fourth of May. I give you till four o'clock on Wednesday—that is, two days less five hours and twenty-five minutes—to bring me the evidence I seek or to prove to me definitely that such evidence does not exist."

"And if I fail, Monsieur?"

"You are dismissed from my service for the insolence you have just shown in criticizing my methods."

"And I am to have a free hand, Monsieur, and no more Gaussins?" asked Lavenne joyfully, and not seeming at all depressed by the final clause.

"You will have a free hand."

Lavenne bowed profoundly and left the room, while Monsieur le Comte de Sartines, turning to his bureau, began to arrange his private correspondence for the day, shutting the door of his mind on official matters.

The position of minister of police under the régime of Louis XV. required very exceptional properties in the man who held it. To begin with, it was necessary that he should be of noble birth, a courtier with all that complex theory of etiquette introduced by Louis XIV. at his fingers' ends; an astute politician, for in this age of ferment high politics had a finger in the pigeonholes of the bureau of Monsieur d'Ombreval; a man with an intimate knowledge of women; a wit in an age when laughter was as poisonous as strychnine; a man of the world and a logician; a dandy, yet not above descending into the sewers of Paris, and, above all, a man proof against hatred; caring nothing for the detestation of the rogues his agents arrested, of the shopkeepers he prosecuted for false weight, of the philosophers he persecuted for false opinions, of the ballad-mongers

and literary larvæ whose fangs he pulled when they grew too strong against Madame du Barry, the king, or the court.

Such a man was De Sartines, complex and multi-faced, smiling to-day on the man whom he would imprison to-morrow, with the order of imprisonment all the time in his pocket; yet not at all to be judged by our standards of right and wrong.

In this bureau at which he sat writing now, among the numerous documents and *dossiers* which it contained, were to be found papers relative to the morals and lives of most of his court acquaintances; you can fancy, then, the feelings of these people rubbing shoulders at court and social functions with this *élégant* who was in himself a living criticism and threat, and who, though feared, was treated by them with scant courtesy—when they dared.

At half past ten Monsieur de Sartines finished his private correspondence and rose from his chair. His eyes fell on the clock, and almost immediately the recollection of Lavenne and his mission recurred to him.

“At four o'clock on Wednesday,” said he, “if this scamp fails to bring me what I seek, he leaves my service. I never go back on my word.”

CHAPTER III

A LADY OF OTHER DAYS

THE establishment of Behrens and Bompard in the Rue Saint Honoré held in the year 1770 a position amid the world of fashion analogous to that of the establishment of Percerin in the early years of the Grand Monarch, albeit the illustrious Percerin was a clothier of the male form and the illustrious Behrens (Bompard was a myth) of the female.

The house of Labille, once famous, had received its death-blow owing to the fact that Madame du Barry had once been an employé, the ladies of the court withdrawing their custom as a protest against the origin of the woman whom fate had placed above them, and with the fading of the Maison Labille the Maison Behrens blossomed forth.

Behrens was a small man with a great personality, possessing a genius for color and effect, a keen eye for a doubtful customer, and a ready tongue.

His show-rooms were the meeting place of the elegant world who came to discuss silk and scandals, to try on dresses and opinions, or simply to examine new models and to talk of hats with Behrens.

Behrens, great man that he was, had risen to the occasion. He had spent a hundred thousand francs on the decoration and enlargement of his premises, tall footmen served chocolate to those requiring it, his female assistants were plain of feature and modest, as though to say, "No Du Barry shall ever sprout from here." In short, in an age when *modiste* was the synonym of a hotbed of vice, Behrens made his establishment all propriety, and it paid. His customers, in fact, were the only blot on the fair name of his shop, and this was not his fault, for they were the best he could find.

On the morning after De Sartines' interview with Lavenne, Madame de Joyeuse, a woman of fifty, the ghost of a beauty, dressed in black, as if in mourning for her lost self, was seated in the silk room of Monsieur Behrens, examining brocades. This lady, who had gained a great name for piety and religious observances, was the wife of that young gentleman whom we have already seen accosting Monsieur de Sartines at Versailles. She was seated in a stiff high-backed arm-chair, her feet on a footstool, while behind her, motionless, dressed in a crimson livery, four feet high and looking as if carved from ebony, stood Zapolite, her black page-boy.

Though Labille had been excommunicated by the

ladies of Paris, his former shop-girl, strange to say, set the fashions; women sneered at yet copied her, and the sight of Zamore behind her carriage had set the fashion for negroes. Their scarcity helped the craze.

The history of Zapolite was less the history of a human being than that of a toby jug or rare piece of china, belonging to this person and that in turn. It was said that Madame de Joyeuse had won him at cards.

Behrens' chief assistant was on his knees before madame, holding the brocade this way and that for the light to strike it, when from the doorway leading into the hat department, Monsieur Behrens himself appeared, followed by a lady.

It was Madame de Stenlis, a woman of thirty, yet looking scarcely twenty-five, exquisitely dressed in a robe of striped white and lavender material, wearing a large picture-hat adorned with plumes of ostrich feathers, and bearing in her hand, as was then the fashion, a tall walking-cane adorned with a bow of ribbon.

The two ladies bowed one to the other and exchanged greetings, while Behrens went to fetch the silk that Madame de Stenlis wished to see.

"And how is dear Monsieur de Joyeuse?" asked

the younger woman, taking her seat on a fauteuil almost facing the other and with command of two mirrors.

"Monsieur de Joyeuse is very well," replied madame, with an edge on her voice, for her female friends, with that kindness of heart so distinctive of the sex, were never forgetful of this inquiry, which was often the opening gambit of a duel of tongues.

"And as youthful as ever?"

"As youthful as ever, Madame, and happy in his youth. Ah, Madame, what a great thing is youth! One can say for it this, at least, it has no past."

Now, Madame de Stenlis possessed a past both political, social and moral, of which more was guessed than known.

"That is so," replied she. "Yet have you not often felt, Madame, what a dismal thing is age in that it has no future? Before heaven, I think that the union of youth and age is the wisest, for is it not the union of a past and a future? One gives the other what the other has not got."

Madame de Stenlis' conversational philosophies held more in them often than the wit of the listener could grapple with on the instant, for she was a rapid speaker and she gave no points, as a rule, that one could catch hold of. Madame de Joyeuse, feel-

ing the ridicule of the other's remark, and unable to attack it because of its cloud-like nature, blinked her eyes.

She was on the point of replying at last when a voice, bell-like, golden—a woman's voice that, once heard, became a treasure of the memory—came from the adjoining room.

"Thank you, but I wish to see Monsieur Behrens himself. He is in the silk room? A thousand thanks."

"The Austrian," said Madame de Stenlis and Madame de Joyeuse, as though they had been automata's tongue-tipped with the same word.

One could see that in a flash the pair had forgotten their mutual differences in the recognition of the presence of a common enemy, and scarcely had they spoken when she appeared, preceded by an assistant who announced in a loud voice, so as to draw the attention of Behrens, "Madame la Baronne Linden."

Sophie Linden—Sophie Anastase Thérèse. Baronne Linden, to give her her full name—formed in the doorway of the silk room of Monsieur Behrens a picture not unworthy of the brush of Fragonard; one might almost say she had his touch; light, flowing, graceful, she seemed to have stepped from the mist and muslin and trees and parterres of Frago-

nard-land, to have dropped from one of those swings that sweep the drapery of May through April-colored air, to have risen from one of those tombs where Grace in distraction has cast herself beneath the autumn trees to mourn for a lover.

Her face beneath the broad mauve hat with its plume of feathers was distracting, perplexing, less beautiful than piquant, capable of somber moods and charming smiles; wit lay on her lips and thought had molded her brow, extraordinary mobility of expression adapted her countenance to the lightest word upon her lips, a deadly property or a delightful, according as to whether she used the rapier of a woman's wit or the laughter which, despite her twenty-five years, was as genuine and clear as the laughter of a young girl.

Withal she had a bonhomie natural and naïve, the real gold of womanhood showing through all the fretwork that her experience of the world had cut upon it.

To be perfectly frank, this lady, who had come to Paris some six weeks ago accredited to the French court on a microscopic mission to the dauphiness from the court of Vienna, was in Vienna a person of considerable obscurity with more natural wit than money, and a fine talent for adventure. Her

husband, Baron Linden, was dead. He had been a small partner in a large bank that had come to grief, and had died leaving his wife nothing but his debts and her jewelry. Either as a bold stroke of policy or urged by a natural honesty, she paid the small creditors by the sale of her jewelry, established a name for honesty, made friends with several financiers, disclosed a faculty for knowing bad speculations from good ones, and blossomed. She possessed that rarest of human gifts, an instinct for things that were genuine, and the financiers of Vienna who were her friends, being men of genius, discovered this instinct, and being men of affairs, made use of it.

Just then Europe was in a condition of ferment and unrest almost analogous to its condition to-day. The deep discontent of the masses, crushed beneath the ambitions of a few men; that discontent which to-day is expressed in socialism and anarchism, was then alive under a different name—or perhaps nameless.

Voltaire was breaking to pieces the shackles of religion; Rousseau at the Café de Régence was preaching the right to think; a thousand men, some in the gutter, some near the throne, were preparing the great explosion of the Revolution.

Rumors of this heaving amid the people filled the world, but were not understood; scarcely appreciated, except by the Jew financiers of Vienna. Wishing to find out the truth of things, they sought an agent, hence the journey to Paris of Madame la Baronne Linden; hence a backstairs intrigue by which our charming friend was intrusted with a present from the empress to the dauphiness, made one of those informal couriers common between the European courts at that period when a present of lace called for a special commissioner to carry it, and a Périgord pie stamped on its cover with the royal arms went in state like an ambassador.

It was the humor of love that the agent of the Viennese Gundermanns should have discovered in her researches into the state of France a conspirator against the monarchy as charming as herself—though of the male sex—the Comte Armand de Lussac.

Received at the court, living in a well-furnished house rented in the Rue Coq Héron, she had made during her short sojourn in the capital a considerable impression on the world of Paris and Versailles, and many enemies, whose enmity gave her that deep satisfaction which the enmity of the unsuccessful and plain creates in the successful and beautiful.

The love she had inspired in De Lussac had created for her a willing assassin in the person of Madame la Comtesse d Harlancourt, whose husband we have seen buttonholing De Sartines at Versailles; Madame de Joyeuse and Madame de Stenlis hated her just for herself, and De Sartines, from her suspected intimacy with De Lussac, whose steps he was following with the persistence of a hound and whose political intrigues he more than suspected, had for her a deep mistrust.

This lady, having bowed to Mesdames de Joyeuse and de Stenlis, advanced and without addressing them turned her attention and tongue on Monsieur Behrens, who was approaching with the silk which Madame de Stenlis had wished to see.

"My dear Behrens," said the new-comer, addressing him *tout court* with the manner of a person addressing a favorite dog, "when you have recovered from the disability under which you are laboring I wish to ask you a question."

"And that, Madame?" cried Behrens, casting the roll of silk on the floor at the feet of Madame de Stenlis, twitching up a few yards of it, festooning it that she might see the lights and shades, bowing to Madame Linden as though she were the dauphiness, smiling, all at the same time; a wonderful man milliner. "And that, Madame?"

"*Ma foi!* Monsieur Behrens, you do so many things at the same time that you have made me forget my question. Dear Madame de Stenlis, do not let me interfere with your decision on that exquisite silk, unless, indeed, you ask me for my opinion of it."

"And your opinion, Madame?"

"Is that it would suit you admirably, both in its exquisite color and superb texture."

Madame de Stenlis turned this compliment over in her mind, mumbled it as a fish mumbles a bait to see if there is a hook in it, and finding none, bowed graciously and looked at the silk anew by way of finding safety.

At this moment, at the same doorway by which Madame Linden had entered, appeared the form of a young man.

It was the Comte de Lussac.

However deeply this gentleman may have been steeped in the philosophy of Rousseau, he did not at all events imitate that master in his dress, which was superb, and standing between the crimson silk curtains of the doorway he made a picture worthy of the brush of Monsieur Drouais. Handsome, with all the elegance of a man of the court, there was yet about him something that stamped him as a man apart, something of the visionary, the enthusiast

and the poet, rare in that age of animal lust, chilling wit and embroidered brutality.

The Comte de Lussac bowed to the ladies, glanced with amusement at Behrens, and advanced to the side of the Baroness Linden, who was still standing opposite Madame de Stenlis.

"Monsieur de Lussac," said the baroness, "your opinion on this silk?"

"Madame," replied the young man with a little laugh, "I can only liken it to the poetry of silkworms, unhappy in the fate that deprives them of the eyes which would enable them to see the majestic form of Monsieur Behrens, the publisher of their work."

"Ah, *ma foi!*" cried the delighted Behrens, "it is easy to see that Monsieur le Comte is himself a poet."

De Lussac bowed.

"Enriching all that he touches, be they silkworms, men—"

"Or women," put in Madame de Joyeuse, with a glance at Madame la Baronne Linden.

De Lussac flushed; he was about to make some reply when the Baroness Systeman and Madame la Comtesse d'Harlancourt entered the room, preceded by a female assistant carrying a huge hat.

The hat was being conveyed before the ladies into the dress department; seeing De Lussac and his companions, however, they turned, bowed to the seated ladies and passed on, Madame d'Harlancourt casting a venomous glance upon De Lussac and ignoring utterly the woman who was standing beside him.

Madame de Stenlis and Madame de Joyeuse laughed. Madame Linden paled for a moment at the insult, then she laughed, and turning to Behrens: "That reminds me, Monsieur Behrens, of the question I wished to ask you. Is there not a robe of green among the dresses I am ordering from you to take to Vienna?"

"Why, yes, Madame, the robe to be worn with that hat of half-blown apple blossoms is of *au bord de rivière* green."

"Then I countermand it, or if already made, send it with my compliments to Madame la Comtesse d'Harlancourt."

"But why, Madame?" cried the astonished Behrens. "Only the other day you were in raptures with the costume as sketched by me for your imagination to dwell upon. And to the Comtesse d'Harlancourt! But why, Madame?"

"Because, my dear Monsieur Behrens, I have just remembered that green is the color of arsenic."

CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PASSION

MADAME LA BARONNE had made some small purchases before entering the silk room, and these the Comte de Lussac, taking them from the hand of the assistant, carried after her to the door of her carriage.

She directed the coachman to drive her home, then, when she was seated with the parcels beside her, she said to the young man, who was standing hat in hand at the door, "Will you not get in?"

Bowing low, he did as she asked him, closed the door, and the carriage started.

Emotional, deeply in love, scarcely twenty-five years of age, and with sensibilities that neither time nor the world had hardened, the young man, for the first time alone with this woman who had fascinated him, could scarcely speak.

Then, with the charming impulsiveness of youth and in a manner quite without offense, he boldly laid his hand upon her little gloved hand resting in her

lap. Without resenting the action, she released her hand and with a smile that atoned for her words, said, "I did not ask you to take a seat in my carriage for that purpose, but because I wished to speak to you alone. Are you my friend?"

"Oh, Madame!" cried De Lussac. "For days past I have sought the opportunity to see you, to speak to you alone, to tell you quite plainly that I have but one thought in the world and that is you, to tell you without any of those compliments that men use toward women that I have but one desire in life, to die for you if need be—and you ask me am I your friend!"

She looked at him for a moment meditatively, almost seriously. Older than he, a woman of the world, with many a shattered illusion and a nature that, however wayward, always returned to balance, the truth and ingenuousness of the young man pleased her as we are always pleased by the thing that is real.

"Tell me," said she. "You speak as though you knew me as I know myself, as though you had proved me from long acquaintanceship. Do you even know who I am?"

"Do I know who you are! Ah, do I not!"

"Who, then, am I?"

"Yourself."

She laughed.

"Where do I come from?"

"Heaven—at least, you bring it with you."

"Taking Vienna and Paris on the way? Alas, no, Monsieur, I am not even a fallen angel—just a Viennese. I always travel in a straight line, and as I am returning to whence I came on Friday, I shall simply go to Vienna, which, indeed, is far enough removed from heaven."

She laughed again, not seeing for a moment how her words had struck him nor how pale he had become.

"You leave on Friday!" he said. "On Friday of this week?"

"Yes, and as I leave Paris to-day for a visit to Compiègne and shall not return till to-morrow afternoon, I took this opportunity of speaking to you alone in my carriage where there are no Monsieur Behrens or Mesdames de Joyeuse to overhear my words. Monsieur, I have only met you four times: once at the Duchesse de Chartres', the next day by accident at the king's hunt in the forest of Senart, the next day by accident at Monsieur Boehmer's, the jeweler in the Rue Royale, and this morning by accident in the shop of Monsieur Behrens.

Now, Monsieur le Comte, three accidents of that sort rarely come together by accident, and I asked you into my carriage to inquire of you how you knew I was to attend the king's hunt, how you knew I was to be found in the shop of Monsieur Boehmer, and in the shop of Monsieur Behrens at eleven o'clock this morning. Have you been spying upon my movements?"

"Madame," said De Lussac quite simply, "I have."

"And the name of your spy?"

"Madame, I can not give you his name because he is a brother affiliated to the order to which I belong."

"A freemason?"

"No, Madame; a society of brethren who have sworn to free the people of France and the world from the tyranny under which they groan."

"A secret society?"

"Secret, Madame, because we live under the shadow of the sword and each one of us knows not at what moment death or the Bastille may be his portion."

"And you tell me this terrible thing which you ought to mention to no man—"

"I tell you it, Madame, because I love you."

At this moment the carriage drew up at the doorway of Number 12 Rue Coq Héron.

"What you have told me, Monsieur," said the baroness, "shows me that at least you have confidence in me. I will be as generous. Come with me into my house."

The Comte de Lussac opened the door, helped his companion to descend, and followed her into the house, the door of which had been opened at the sound of the carriage wheels by an old servant, white-bearded, and dressed in a livery that was an obvious misfit.

"Any letters, Placide?" asked his mistress as she crossed the hall toward the stairs leading to the first floor and the drawing-room.

"No, Madame," replied the old fellow in a grumbling voice.

"Any callers?"

"Only a man from Boehmer, the jeweler, Madame, to say that the diamond necklace would be ready by Wednesday as you desired. He brought some message as to the fine quality of the stones having delayed its completion, but I have forgotten it, nor does it matter, for all these jewelers and tradesmen are liars."

The baroness laughed as she led the way up-stairs.

"Placide is an original," she said, opening the door of her boudoir and exposing a pretty little salon decorated and upholstered in a scheme of blue; an escritoire stood in one corner, two windows gave a view of the Rue Coq Héron, and between the windows, on an ormolu table, a great bowl of hothouse flowers filled the air with their fragrance.

"One might fancy him an old servant," she continued, casting her gloves, which she had removed, on the couch, and going to the bowl of flowers which she rearranged as if for the pleasure of touching them. "He is old enough in all conscience, as far as age goes, but he has only been a very short time in my service. Listen."

A wrangling sound came from below stairs.

"He is quarreling with Rosine. He keeps the whole house in order. He is becoming insufferable."

"Why, then, do you not dismiss him?" asked De Lussac, who had taken his seat on the fauteuil and with the boldness of a lover was caressing one of the gloves which she had cast there.

"Because, dear Monsieur de Lussac, though he has only been in my service a few days, I find him invaluable—he is my chaperon."

"Your chaperon?"

"Yes."

Still arranging the flowers, she touched a bell near the window. In a moment the door opened and Placide appeared.

"Placide," said his mistress, "kindly take my gloves to Rosine. Where are they? Ah, I left them upon the fauteuil. Monsieur de Lussac, may I trouble you to pass my gloves to Placide?"

De Lussac, biting his lip with mortification, handed the gloves, which the surly old man carried off, closing the door behind him.

"You see, he is quite useful," said Madame la Baronne, finishing the arrangement of her flowers. "I really did not want a man-servant. I engaged him half from pity and also because he was so quaint. He is some relation of my cook. Do you not agree with me that he is useful?"

"He may be useful, Madame," replied De Lussac, who had recovered his temper, "but this I will say—he is not honest."

"Placide not honest! In what way, Monsieur le Comte?"

"He has robbed me of your gloves." He rose from the couch and advanced as if to take her hand. She stretched it toward the bell and he paused.

"Monsieur le Comte, pray take your seat again on

the fauteuil, and I will take this chair, and so we shall not weary Placide. Now, let us talk. I am touched by your confidence in me, and I have heard the declaration you made to me with mixed feelings."

"Oh, Madame!"

"One moment! That declaration from a man to a woman in my position may be the sincerest compliment, or the reverse. In which way am I to take it?"

"In this way, Madame," replied the young man, rising from the couch and standing before her as a courtier might stand before a queen. "When I said 'love', I said in that word all that love implies: respect, lifelong devotion. Without putting it in words, I asked you to share my future and my fortune as my wife."

Madame la Baronne rose from her chair and bowed.

Standing before her, he bowed in return. It was a quaint picture, in keeping with the dress and the elegant customs of the time.

He did not again attempt to take her hand; she had at a stroke put a gulf between them such as exists between a powerful potentate and the ambassador of an inferior power.

"To your offer, Monsieur," she made answer, as they sat down again, "I can only reply that I thank you sincerely for the compliment it contains; that, frankly, I have never met a man I liked so much as I do he—she blushed slightly—"the Comte de Lussac, that I have taken a deep interest in him, if for no other reason than because he is so unlike the fops and fools of Paris; and that just for that reason, and because I wish to study the welfare of those whom I like, I ought to decline his offer. To do so would merely be fair."

"Madame—"

"One moment," replied this extraordinary woman who to the genuine was always genuine. "You are Monsieur le Comte de Lussac, with large estates and a splendid fortune, if you do not spoil it by entangling yourself with the enemies of the king; you have fallen in love with a woman of no fortune, no position, an adventuress—"

"Cease, Madame!" cried De Lussac violently, rising from his seat as though he were addressing an enemy. "Not another word against the woman I love. Fortune, position! Those words are blasphemy against the holy spirit of love. Adventuress? What care I if she is an adventuress? Call her what you will, you can not deceive my heart or



"When I said love, I said in that word all that love implies."



tell me against my understanding and my instinct that she is anything but pure."

Actually in his anger and defense of the baroness this idealist had almost forgotten her presence and the fact that he was defending her against herself. The baroness, in amazement, stared at him as one stares at a prodigy. Had this man, then, with the clear sight of a passionate and lofty understanding, divined in her the true woman whose presence she herself had not troubled to search for? Her life was far from blameless, in the eyes of strict virtue: love-affairs, money affairs, intrigues, filled the story of her past; yet at heart—the only consideration that matters at all, when all is said and done—at heart was she as he declared her to be? She had never thought of the question before. She looked at herself as a woman of the world who had led the life of the world. Had any other man said to her, "You are a blameless woman," she would have laughed in his face, or, more probably, smacked it, taking the statement as a piece of cynicism. But De Lussac did not make a statement; he enunciated a fact, he spoke with all the fervor of a man who knows; with the conviction of surety. It was fascinating—fascinating as waking up on a December morning, opening one's window and finding May-

day. Madame Linden was not, however, a woman to temporize with pleasant fictions. With the pleasure one feels in destroying a fair thing, once ours but taken from us by fraud, she turned to her defender.

"Monsieur," said she, "I have already had four lovers."

"And what, Madame," replied the disciple of Jean Jacques, "have those lovers to do with me? Do you for a moment think that I belong to that order of men whose philosophy debars the needs of life and the consideration of the human heart? When I ask you to give yourself to me, I ask for your future, not for your past. Love is the water of life. God sent you into the world with a full pitcher to find me; that you have on the way given drink to four thirsty men, is that a reason for my finding the water less sweet? But this I will swear, you have never given of that gift but for generous reasons."

"Monsieur," replied she, confused by this extraordinary speech, almost on the verge of tears, "your philosophy confounds me."

"Oh, Madame, I am only the mouthpiece of a philosopher, the priest of a religion, the imitator of a man divine because of his humanity. What love I have for my fellow-men and whatever broadness

of view, was first taught and given to me by him—Jean Jacques Rousseau.”

“And before such a priest,” replied the baroness, “a confession is useless that is a half-confession. What I have said to you, Monsieur, is but the beginning. Well, then, listen. The woman you would marry despite the facts I have told you is a woman weak in many ways. She is fond of the material things of the world: of dress, of gaiety, of pleasure; she is spiteful very often to other women, and she has a passion for matching what brains she has against the brains of men, often in very petty ways; she is a woman who does not brook contradiction. The man who marries her must be content with her love; her mind she retains as her own property, settled upon her before marriage. Well, Monsieur, what do you say of such a woman?”

“Only this,” said De Lussac, sinking on his knees beside her and taking her hand. “Only this: I love her.”

He raised the white tapering fingers to his lips and kissed them; then passing his arm round her waist and drawing her toward him, their lips met, clung together; they breathed each other. In a moment and at that magic touch, the passion for him that had been slowly gathering in her heart be-

came vividly alive; his youth, the dawn of his life, the springtime of his manhood became part of her. He had read her aright: the heart that no man had touched fully till now had awakened. The woman of the world was no longer there. The world itself was forgotten—for a moment.

“Listen to me,” she said, holding him away from her as though she wished to gaze at him and touch him at the same time. “You have made me love you; you have spoken to me of love as a priest might speak of religion; let us pause for a moment, even as we are—would that we could always remain even as we are, like people on a height gazing at a fair country! Tell me, have you ever cared for another?”

For a moment De Lussac was silent.

“You do not answer me?”

“I do not answer you, because I am thinking how strange it is that before I met you I cared for another woman, and that your image entering my mind shattered her image, destroyed it as a sunbeam destroys a shadow.”

“Who was it?”

“You have seen her to-day.”

“Ah! Madame d’Harlancourt? You do not care for her still?”

"For me, she is not in the world."

He sprang to his feet and Madame Linden, turning with a little cry, found that Placide had entered the room.

"Why did you not knock?" cried the baroness angrily. "Is that the manner for a servant to enter a room?"

"Madame," replied Placide, "I did knock, but you were so preoccupied—"

"Hold your tongue!"

"Yes, Madame."

"Go. But stay—why did you come? I did not ring."

"I came, Madame, to ask you at what time you required the carriage to take you to Compiègne."

"At two o'clock. Have everything ready. You know you are to accompany me?"

"Yes, Madame."

He went out and the baroness turned to her lover.

"Fortunately, it was only Placide. One never minds him. And now, my friend, sit down beside me here on the fauteuil, for I have something serious to say—no, do not take my hand until I have finished speaking; then take it, and keep it for ever, or for ever leave it. Listen: you say you love me."

"I love you."

"You would give up everything for me?"

"I would give up my soul."

"I ask you for a gift of far less value. I ask you to give up your ambition."

"Never, for my only ambition is to possess you."

"Now you are talking like a lover, that is, a person more and yet less than a man. By your ambition, I mean the intrigues against the state in which you are engaged and which will bring you to ruin. You wish for me, and I am yours, but only on the condition that you leave Paris when I leave it, join me in Vienna, and renounce for ever these plots and conspiracies which will end in the ruin of France and will include your own inevitable ruin."

"What you ask from me now is my soul," replied the young man, rising and pacing the floor.

"Have it so. I ask for your soul, but for no bad purpose. I know you intimately, as only a woman can know the man she loves. I know your ambition, and I honor you for it. I came here from Vienna to study the state of France; I see all the elements of disaster and ruin; I see a house about to fall, and I would pluck you from the ruins."

"I, whose whole ambition is to be one of the architects of that ruin!"

"There are others to fill your place. And mark

this, no man can ruin a state, states ruin themselves. Why should you, young, innocent, wealthy, with all the elements of happiness in your heart, why should you be crushed in the ice-jam of folly?"

De Lussac ceased pacing the floor and gazed at her for a moment, as if drinking in her words. Then he took her hand, led her to one of the windows of the room and flung it open.

The sounds of the Rue Coq Héron, all sorts of weird cries of old Paris, filled the room; the cry of the street hawker came across the little courtyard, the blind man's pipe, the rumble of a hackney-coach and the footsteps of the passers-by.

"That is why," said he, pointing before her. "Look! Look at those people; look at their faces; see that woman, that rag-picker who is herself a bundle of rags! And this is not a mean street, but the Rue Coq Héron; and this is nothing in a city given over to starvation, misery, and despair; filled with a people whose blood has been sucked by a vampire king and a vampire courtesan."

She closed the window.

"To-morrow," said she, gently leading him from it, "those people, should they destroy their vampire king, would turn vampires themselves; out of that gutter another king would arise as surely as another

sun will dawn to-morrow. What you are attacking is not the evil of the king and court but the evil that lies in the human heart. By the fierce overthrow of the existing state of things, will you alter the heart of man? Never, never, never! No more than by furiously destroying a bad crop will you make new corn grow. Destruction, my friend, is the logic of a madman. You would raise the people by ruining the nobles, when your policy ought to be to ruin the nobles by raising the people." Then, turning to the window, she paused for a moment, gazed out at the street, and turned again.

"It seems to me, from my experience of the world, that all conspirators are children. One can not help loving them as they beat their bare palms on the door, break their toys, succeed sometimes in their little revolutions which, however, leave the great world somehow the same as before." She came to him where he was sitting with his face between his hands, drew them away from his face and kissed him. Then taking him by the hand, she talked to him, talked to him the philosophy of humanity divorced from the philosophy of hate, spoke simply and truly and well. With humor and logic and that bell-like voice that was in itself an argu-

ment, she led his mind as a child is led by a firm and gentle hand to the heights of her point of view.

"And now," finished she, "choose, my friend, which you will have. Myself, my future, my love and the power to work for your fellow-men by rational methods—or the course you are now pursuing and the ruin it will lead to."

He stood up, took both her hands and held them while he spoke, looking into her eyes as he spoke.

"For you I would deny my religion and my country, renounce my wealth and title, walk barefoot through the world and fling my soul to Satan; if by so doing I could buy you paradise."

"Then you will leave France with me?"

"I will."

"Forget your enmity to the king?"

"I will, for you have shown me the hatefulness of personal enmity. Your philosophy will be my philosophy. With the same aim, let us work by different methods."

He folded her in his arms.

"Now leave me," she said. "I have affairs to arrange before I start for Compiègne. I will return to-morrow afternoon. Will you meet me here at three o'clock?"

"I will be here. And your address at Compiègne?"

"My address will be the Villa Rose Compiègne, the first house as you enter the town by the Paris road."

CHAPTER V

“REGARDLESS OF ALL THINGS”

A FEW minutes later the Comte de Lussac left the house of the baroness; he turned to the right in the direction of the Rue Saint Honoré. He did not see or notice a rag-picker with basket and forked stick who was walking on the opposite side of the way. Now the Comte de Sartines, though he had promised Lavenne to give him a free hand and to leave the watching of Monsieur de Lussac entirely to him, was afflicted with that disease which spoils so many lives and plans—mistrust.

He had promised Lavenne to trouble him with no more Gaussins; that did not exclude the use of other spies, and so it came about that this morning, though no word at all had come from Lavenne, a message scribbled on a piece of paper reached the Hôtel de Sartines about noon. It ran:

“The Comte de L. called at the shop of Behrens at half past ten. At eleven he left with the Baroness L. in her carriage. They drove to her home where

they entered. Carriage was dismissed. He has not yet come out. Will follow and report."

Signed. JONDRIK. (Agent.)

The comte, utterly unconscious of the fact that he was being followed and watched, oblivious to the fact that he had eaten nothing that day and that the hour for *déjeuner* had passed, heedless of all things earthly but the sunshine, the opening of a new life before him and the fact that he was loved by the woman he adored, turned from the Rue Coq Héron into the Rue Peysette.

Yesterday, even this morning, this man's main objective had been the destruction of the existing state of things; up to his eyes in a most dangerous conspiracy, filled with the blind fury of the eagle, his only idea was to strike, regardless of life and fortune and even love.

In an hour love had changed his outlook considerably. Still at heart with the cause of revolution the common sense of the woman he loved was working in his mind.

"You would raise the people by destroying the nobles, when on the contrary, you ought to destroy the power of the nobles by raising the people. * * * Destruction is the logic of the madman."

It was as though in a flash of genius, she had

shown him the future, blood-red destruction leaving society altered, but the human heart the same.

He had promised her to leave France. He would leave it. He had promised to break free from the militant revolutionary society to which he belonged; he would do so while reserving to himself the right to assist it with funds, if on reconsideration of the problem with her she agreed. For the betterment of humanity he would never cease working. Destruction, the red aims of the men who were already procreating the demon of the revolution, all these were alien to him now. Happiness, and the prospect of lifelong happiness with the woman he loved, had cast out hatred from his soul. He would break free from the malignant cuttlefish with whom he had cast his lot.

Alas! Who can free himself from the consequences of his past acts?

As he entered the Rue Peysette the rag-pickers entered it too.

Half-way down the street he heard a step behind him.

"Good day, Monsieur de Lussac."

A tall dark man, with a saturnine cast of countenance, a man well-dressed and carrying a portfolio under his arm had overtaken him.

"Walk beside me," said this person, "and do not show any sign of surprise at what I say, or raise your voice. I am being followed. All is over, at least for the present. The police have made a perquisition at the Rue Saint Jacques, Barthelmy and Conflans are arrested. I as the head center am on the edge of arrest, this portfolio is only a blind, it contains nothing of importance, but I have with me a small packet, it contains papers and the names of the committee, their addresses abroad and in Paris, and the seal. I was on my way to your house to intrust it to you."

"I am leaving Paris for Vienna," said De Lussac, shocked at this hand which the conspiracy had suddenly laid on his shoulder.

"Good, you will take it with you till we can reconstitute ourselves, but you must not keep it on your person; bury it, hide it, till you leave, lest you should be arrested and it be found on you."

"I will do so," replied De Lussac.

"But that is not all, there is a counter-stroke. De Sartines, who has us in his power, is in our power if we can only act. You are the person who must act so as to free us. You are a free agent, there is no evidence against you and you are so highly placed that they dare not arrest you on suspicion as they

have Barthelmy and Conflans and as they will most likely me. *Dieu!* the perspiration pours from me when I think that some hand may be laid on my shoulder before I have time to tell you. Listen! The people are starving. De Sartines, Terray and the king, with your kinsman, De Richelieu for assistant, have bought up all the corn available, using as agent a man, Monsieur Porcheron of Vitry. A contract has been signed with Porcheron, that contract has De Sartines' name upon it, that contract is in the house of your kinsman, De Richelieu, and that contract you must secure. Once it is in your hands you have De Sartines in your power, and the release of Conflans and Barthelmy follows: we can then reconstitute ourselves and go on working."

"But how does this contract place De Sartines in our power?"

Said the stranger, speaking slowly, patiently, as if explaining to a child: "The people are starving, the price of corn is rising day by day. Who is raising the price of corn and bread? Who, but the conspirators of whom De Sartines is the chief. They have withdrawn half the corn of France from the markets to sell it at the highest figure—"

"*Dieu!*" cried De Lussac, suddenly comprehending. "What a villainy! If this were proved—"

"If it were proved, the people would tear De Sartines to pieces or hang him, and the king, to save his name, would give them the rope."

"Is the king's name upon this contract?"

"There is no name but the names of De Sartines and Porcheron."

"And with this contract in one's hand—"

"De Sartines will be entirely in your power."

"Are you sure it is in the possession of the duc?"

"Certain, our agents are never mistaken, it is in his house at Versailles. Have you dined with Monsieur le Duc lately?"

"No."

"If you had, you would have been waited on by a footman of exceptionally good manners and appearance. He was one of us—Lamport—a man you have never seen; he was there to secure this document but he was arrested last night. Besides Conflans and Barthelmy, dozens of smaller men have been arrested."

"Does the Duc de Richelieu suspect that Lamport joined his service in order to secure the paper?"

"Oh, no, the corn merchants fancy themselves secure in their infamy and rightly, for the thing has been done in most entire secrecy. It was Porcheron's wife who betrayed the matter to an agent of

ours.' Love, my friend, is very useful in affairs of this kind."

De Lussac shuddered.

"But a document of this sort—how comes it that such a thing should exist?"

"How comes it? Do you intrust a man with millions of francs to purchase millions of sacks of corn through fifty subagents without a written contract, without a receipt, without the names of the subagents and small corn factors being mentioned? All these are in the document with the signature 'De Sartines' to the statement, 'This is in order.'"

"And you wish me to abstract this paper from the house of my cousin, Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu?"

"No, Monsieur, I order you to do so."

"Ah, true." De Lussac remembered for the first time fully, that he was in the presence of his chief. He remembered, for the first time, the terms of his oath, "to help, regardless of all things, and at the chance of death, any brother under arrest or in affliction."

There was no use in grumbling, there was no use in saying, "To help these men I must, under the guise of friendship and kinsmanship, enter the house of Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu and commit,

or attempt to commit, a petty theft." The thing was horrible and revolting to his nature but it had to be done, or attempted. "Regardless of all things." He had sworn to those words with his eyes open and of his own free will. He never imagined that his honor as a gentleman would be required of him.

"I will do it," he said, pale to the lips but speaking in a firm voice.

"The document," said the other, "is presumably in the *escritoire* in the library of Monsieur le Duc. He keeps there his most important papers. It may not be there, but on the chance, Lamport, seizing his opportunity, made a wax impression of the key. To get at the key that man had to visit the duc's bedroom at the risk of his life, at dead of night; to open a drawer in which the duc places his rings, his watch, and his keys; to take out a bunch of seven keys without the bunch jingling; to make a wax impression of each key, not knowing which was the key required; to return the keys to the drawer in exactly the same place, and leave the room without disturbing the light slumber of an old man. This he did and sent the impressions to us; the keys were made but before they could be sent to him, last night, he was arrested. Think of the fidelity and

courage of this man who is now lying a prisoner at Vincennes. We are all in your hands. I myself may be arrested at any moment. I suspect that I am not already arrested simply because they are giving me a little freedom so that they may watch my movements. Now walk close to me and with your left hand take the packet I spoke of first and slip it into your pocket."

De Lussac did so.

"Now, take the keys."

De Lussac did so.

"Bury the packet somewhere safely, and so as to be doubly sure, send a note to Monsieur Blanc, Number 3, Rue Petit Versailles, stating that you have buried a packet of the utmost importance to us in such and such a place, so that, in the event of your arrest or death, he may recover it. You have a servant you can trust?"

"Yes."

They had passed through many streets. The stranger had let De Lussac lead the way, so engrossed was he with the conversation, and De Lussac had walked wherever chance might lead him; chance, or instinct, perhaps, had led him by a maze of streets into the street where he lived, the Rue de Valois.

At this period, the Rue de Valois was perhaps the most fashionable street in Paris. Here Madame du Barry had her town house where the Vicomte Jean du Barry lived when he chose to favor Paris with his presence, the Comte de Coigny dwelt here, and the Comte d'Harlancourt, whose residence was situated almost opposite to the Hôtel de Lussac.

"That is all," said De Lussac's companion. "I will leave you here and pass on, while you enter your house. Remember that our fates are all in your hands and the fate of France, for, if you fail to get De Sartines in your power, he will stop at nothing, not even torture, to extract confessions from the men he has imprisoned. Some one of them will be sure to confess, giving full details—and then good-by for ever to the hopes of the people."

He raised his hat and passed on.

Had any one been watching, he might have fancied that two casual acquaintances had parted, never two conspirators who between them held the future and the fate of France.

De Lussac, when the door opened to him, passed into a glassed-in courtyard and between two rows of orange trees set in green painted tubs to the doorway of the house.

At this period, it was necessary for a nobleman

who wished to keep close to affairs, to follow his king and to possess a mansion within easy distance of the king's residence. As his majesty was constantly changing his residence from Paris to Versailles, from Versailles to Marly, and so forth, it is easy to imagine the drain this custom imposed on the resources of the nobility. De Lussac, who was indifferent to custom, contented himself with a single residence in Paris and the Château de Lussac, the family house in Auvergne; utterly regardless of the sneers of the titled larvæ, the brocaded parasites of the court who dubbed him "the Auvergnat". So he managed to live the life he chose to live, to avoid oppressing his tenantry and to give largely to the poor—a most admirable figure in a society cold, glittering, and as indifferent to man as the Jungfrau—without the Jungfrau's purity.

De Lussac had left the house of the baroness filled with this kindlier philosophy and outlook on life and lo! half-way down the Rue Peysette the revolution had tapped him on the shoulder.

Now, as he stood in his library, having closed the door, he faced his position.

Philosophy or no philosophy, his plain course of duty lay straight before him. These men were in prison and his oath compelled him to liberate them

at all costs. De Sartines must be bound in his own toils, and to do so he, the Comte de Lussac, must enter the house of his kinsman and play the part of a petty thief.

He no longer belonged to the Society of the Midi in heart, he was about to divorce himself from it and the oath he had taken did not prevent him from leaving it at will, but it very explicitly bound him to the course of action which the head center had just laid down for him.

As he stood before the writing-table contemplating his position, the sweat moistened the palms of his hands. He would have to ransack De Riche-lieu's bureau like a common robber, opening the drawers with duplicate keys; he would have to lie, and deceive, and act deception under the garb of friendliness and kinsmanship.

For a moment, despair at the trap he found himself in filled his heart. Then came the thought, "You are doing this for whom? Not yourself. The more repugnant to you the greater the sacrifice. Be firm."

He sat down to the writing-table and taking a sheet of writing-paper from a Spanish cedar-wood box, he dipped a pen in ink and wrote with a firm hand:

"To-day I am burying in the earth of the first orange-tree tub on the right as you enter my courtyard, a packet of vital importance to the S. de M. Should I be arrested or should I die show this letter to Jasmin, my valet. He is entirely to be trusted. Unearth the packet and make use of it as your wisdom sees fit.

"Signed, ARMAND DE LUSSAC."

He pushed the sheet of paper away and took another.

He wrote:

"When I left your house to-day, fate overtook me in the form of Monsieur de Fleury, the chief of the society to which I belong. The police have visited the offices of the society and arrested many members. It is my duty to attempt to free them. This I am about to do. If I fail, you will not, perhaps, see me again. If I succeed, I shall be at your house to-morrow at the hour appointed.

"Till death,

"Yours,

"ARMAND."

He rose from his chair and paced the room for a moment.

Then he sat down and folded, sealed, and addressed the letters. He rang the bell. It was an-

swered by Jasmin, the servant who always attended to his personal wants.

"Take this letter," said the comte, "to Monsieur Blanc, Number 3, Rue Petit Versailles, see him personally and place it in his hands. Take this letter to Compiègne to Madame la Baronne Linden at the Villa Rose. You had better take a post-chaise for the journey. Ask the house steward for what money you require."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Should Monsieur Blanc not be at home, do not leave the letter at his house, wait till your return from Compiègne. It is for his hands alone."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Pack me all I require in the way of clothes for three days' absence, have the portmanteau placed in my traveling-carriage and order the horses to be got ready. I am going to Versailles on a visit to Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu."

"Yes, Monsieur."

Jasmin retired, leaving the young man alone.

Turning to the desk, he began to arrange his papers, burning some and putting others in order.

He knew that in the adventure on hand, his life would hang upon a hair, for Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu was a gentleman who, if he failed to pass

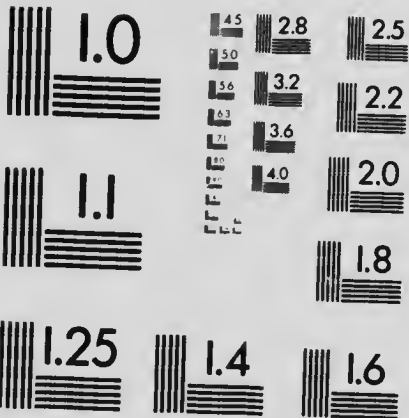
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his sword through the heart of a kinsman caught ransacking his papers, would inevitably order his servants to complete the business.



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CHAPTER VI

THE BUREAU OF DE RICHELIEU

AT two o'clock, Monsieur de Lussac, faultlessly dressed, passed between the orange trees of his courtyard to the outer door. He had sent the porter back to the house for his gloves, and, taking advantage of his absence, he scooped a hole in the mold of the first orange-tree tub on the right, inserted the package given to him by Monsieur de Fleury, smoothed the mold, and had just finished brushing the remnants of it from his hand with his handkerchief when the man returned.

Then, taking his seat in the carriage, he gave his orders to the coachman and they started.

Now, the rag-picker who had followed him from the Rue Coq Héron, who had seen him pick up Monsieur de Fleury—a suspect; who had seen him parting from De Fleury at his door and entering his house, full of the importance of what he had seen, instead of patiently remaining on watch, returned to the Hôtel de Sartines and made his depo-

sition to Monsieur Beauregard, De Sartines' lieutenant. Then he hastened back and took up his post of observation at ten minutes past two, that is to say, exactly six minutes after De Lussac had departed for Versailles.

By this fault he condemned himself to a whole evening and night of mounting guard over a house empty of its master, and he lost Monsieur De Sartines a point in the game, for had De Sartines been apprised of the young man's movements, he would have notified his police in Versailles, who had a spy in every house, not excepting that of Monsieur de Richelieu.

It was a lovely afternoon, and as they left Paris and its sordidness behind them, De Lussac, lowering the windows of the carriage, inhaled the air with a delight momentary and banished by the remembrance of what was on hand.

He had no plan of campaign. That the duc, though surprised at the suddenness of his visit, would be delighted to receive him, he felt sure, for De Richelieu had several times invited him on a visit, leaving it open to him to come when he chose; besides, the duc was his nearest relation and if De Lussac died before him, would be heir to the Auvergne estates.

He would have to give a reason, however, for his visit; that would be easy enough—nothing to the difficulties of a search for a carefully guarded paper in a house filled, perhaps, with guests.

De Richelieu's mansion was situated on the Paris road on the left as one approaches the palace. The gates swung open for the carriage, which, approaching the front door by a courtyard, set with laburnum and lilac trees, drew up, and the Comte de Lussac, ascending the steps where a lackey was waiting to receive him, passed into the galleried hall where the majordomo, Monsieur Beaupré, advanced to receive him.

This personage, who possessed a vast, stolid, expressionless face that seemed molded from white wax, was one of those perfect functionaries who knew everybody, and everything about everybody, everything about court etiquette, everything about precedence.

He knew the Comte de Lussac, his affairs, his peculiar manner of living, his neglect of those things which were essential to success in society, and the nickname with which the court had dubbed him. He despised him as heartily as a man of his sort could despise a man of De Lussac's sort, but he

showed nothing of his thoughts as he bowed before him.

"Good afternoon, Beaupré," said the young man, giving his hat and gloves to the servant who had admitted him. "Is Monsieur le Duc at home?"

"No, Monsieur, Monsieur le Duc is at Luciennes, but I am expecting him to return at any moment."

"Is Monsieur Raffé in?"

"Monsieur Raffé is in the library, Monsieur."

"Ah, the library," said De Lussac, his heart leaping at the words. "Show me to him."

The majordomo led the way across the hall to a door opening on the left; he opened the door and disclosed the library of Monsieur le Maréchal Duc de Richelieu. De Lussac, as he entered, could not but feel that the omen was with him, inasmuch as this, the first room he entered, was the room he had come to plunder.

It was not very large, this library of Monsieur le Duc. It had only one window of stained glass, blazoned with the arms of the Richelieus and heavily barred on the outside—through the colors of the glass, the gray ghostlike shadows of the bars showed vaguely and like a menace.

The books, chiefly tall folios sumptuously bound

and stamped on the backs in gold with the Richelieu arms, stood in open bookcases.

Near the window, at a table by the only bureau in the room, sat a man engaged in writing. It was Raffé, De Richelieu's steward, factotum, and right hand; he was engaged on the monthly accounts, going over each bill, item by item and sou by sou.

"Why, it is Monsieur le Comte de Lussac," cried the old man, rising from his chair and advancing to greet the new-comer. "How unfortunate that Monsieur le Duc should be absent! But I am expecting him at any moment."

"It does not matter," replied the comte, "I have come on a visit for a day or two, if my cousin will have me; the air of Paris has suddenly become too much for me and I am suffering from sleeplessness. I have some luggage in my carriage; will you kindly have it seen to? Meanwhile, I will, if you will permit me, amuse myself with a book till my cousin's return."

"Oh, Monsieur," cried Raffé, as he gathered up his papers, "I can assure you that my master will be only too delighted at your visit. I will have your room prepared and your luggage brought to it. Can I send you any refreshments, Monsieur, after your journey?"

"No, thank you, dear Monsieur Raffé. I require nothing in the way of refreshment but a book; you know that I am a bibliophile, a creature to whom the smell of Russia leather bindings and the sight of printers' ink are refreshment in themselves; but it seems to me that my cousin has extended his library since I last was here."

"Why, yes, Monsieur," replied Raffé, lingering with the papers in his hand, "only last month he acquired half the library of Monsieur de Meneval, books of amorous adventure, *contes*, superbly funny. Monsieur may like to amuse himself with them; they are on those lower shelves."

He bowed and passed out with his papers, and De Lussac turned to the books of Monsieur de Meneval.

These books of Monsieur de Meneval were mostly illustrated, and were so piquant that the mildest of them would in our age be relegated to the highest and most inaccessible shelves of a curio hunter's collection. Indeed, the whole of Monsieur de Richelieu's library might have been catalogued under three divisions: books like these, books concerning war, and books relative to the chase.

De Lussac, taking a volume entitled, *Les Contes de Suzane*, written by a gentleman named Raport, and bearing the imprimatur, "Paris, 1732," laid it

on the little table left vacant by Raffé, opened it and sat down before it.

The adventures of Suzane, however, admirably as they were described by Monsieur Raport, held little interest for De Lussac; in fact, his eyes never once rested on the book.

The bureau of Monsieur de Richelieu had all his attention, held his eyes, fascinated him. There were six drawers in it.

In his pocket was the bunch of seven keys, the exact facsimiles of the keys of Monsieur de Richelieu. Each of these keys was different in size and shape from its fellows. It was probable, therefore, that only one key could open any drawer in the bureau, and it was presumable that the locks were of the same caliber. He took the bunch from his pocket. Yes, beyond any doubt five of these keys were much too broad in the barrel and too heavy of make to enter the lock-holes; one key was so small as to be quite out of count—it evidently belonged to a trinket case; one remained, seeming of a size exactly suitable.

With the perspiration standing in beads on his forehead, De Lussac rose from his seat, paused before the bureau, listening intently for the slightest sound outside and then, boldly and with a perfectly

steady hand inserted the key in the lock of the top-most right-hand drawer; it turned with the ease of a perfect mechanism.

De Lussac caught a glimpse of papers in the drawer before pushing it back and removing the key. Then, rapidly bending, he tried the middle drawer on the left. The key opened it also. This satisfied him. The key was the master-key of the bureau, all the drawers opened to it, and placing the bunch in his pocket, he sat down again and began slowly to turn over the pages of the *Contes de Suzane*.

Up till now, he had been working without a plan, but now as he sat, breathing hard from the excitement of the last few minutes and turning the pages of the book, a plan both practical and simple formed itself in his brain. He would wait till night, then, while the household was asleep, he would leave his room, descend the stairs, enter the library and with the whole night before him to work in, finish the vile business at one stroke.

It did not occur to him that there was anything ominous in the seeming simplicity of all this, or anything strange in the fact that such an astute man as the duc should leave his most important papers so carelessly placed. He did not know the fact that

this library and its contents were guarded with the utmost care, and that Raffé would never have left it had he—De Lussac—been a stranger or any one at all but a near kinsman of the duc's.

As he sat turning the doubtful pages of the *Contes de Suzane*, a voice sounded from the hall, the door opened and Monsieur le Duc, walking with the light step of a man of twenty, and dressed in riding attire, entered the room.

There was something astonishing, almost disturbing in the youthfulness of De Richelieu. It was almost impossible to believe that this man was the conqueror of Mahon, the lover of women long dead, the boon companion of men whose very names were half forgotten; a man whose figure had become part of romance and history, still youthful, brilliant, and filled with the ambitions of the world.

Raffé alone saw the real Richelieu as he appeared in the morning before his valet and the excitement of the day had transformed him and awakened to life that vast fund of energy which was his chief possession.

"Ah, my dear philosopher," cried the duc, advancing and embracing De Lussac. "What a happy thought to come and see me! Raffé informs me you have come prepared to spend some days. That is

well. And how is Paris, and that dear Monsieur Rousseau, how is he, as dirty as ever?"

"Oh, Monsieur," replied De Lussac, to whom a bright idea had suddenly occurred, "there is nothing dirty about Monsieur Rousseau except the mud which people sling at him. I have not come to speak to you about him—I have something much more serious upon my mind."

"A woman?" asked the maréchal, taking his seat on a fauteuil and waving the other to a chair.

"No, Monsieur, a man."

'A man?'

"More than a man—a conspirator against the state."

"Let us be clear. You have discovered a man who is conspiring against the state?"

"Precisely, and I wish for your advice. He is a friend of mine. I have only to enter the house of a friend of his, place my hand upon a document in his possession, hand it to the authorities and he is destroyed."

"Yes, and why do you not do so?"

"This friend of his is a friend of mine, Monsieur. I would have to enter his house in the guise of a friend, ransack his papers, act as a spy. This does not seem to me an honorable course of action."

"Monsieur," replied the duc, "if you have discovered a man who is conspiring against the good of France, there is no question of honor; your duty is clear."

"And that duty is—"

"To denounce him."

"But to enter a house under the guise of friendship!"

"There is no such thing as friendship in politics," replied De Richelieu. "If you have discovered this friend of yours to be a scoundrel actuated by motives against the welfare of the state, why, *ma foi*, you have but one duty, and that duty is to the state."

"I am glad you think so."

"I am pleased that you should think my advice worth asking. Is it to this that I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

"Partly," replied De Lassac, glancing toward the bureau, "and partly to find what I seek."

"And that?"

"Is rest for a few days."

"You will find it here. The house is at your disposal, and this gentleman whose conspiracies you wish to unearth—"

"I will tell you his name when my plans have been successful."

"And I will tell you that his majesty will not be indifferent to your services. Have you informed De Sartines?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur, I wish to work in this matter quite alone and not share the honor of my discovery with Monsieur de Sartines."

De Richelieu laughed.

"*Mordieu*, it is droll," said he, "for mark you—this is between ourselves—our dear De Sartines—hum—hum—"

"Yes, Monsieur—"

"Only this: his majesty said to me this morning, 'Tell your young cousin De Lussac that Monsieur de Sartines is quite concerned about his health.' You know the way his majesty has of saying things."

"So you think—"

"I think nothing. I just tell you what I heard. Also, as I was leaving the palace yesterday evening, I met our friend De Sartines. You see, you lead your own life and mix yourself up with these philosophers and people. I say nothing about that. If it amuses you to dabble in these matters it is nothing to me, so long as you exclude yourself from the hole and corner revolutionaries, those half-starved sedition-mongers, ballad makers, canaille of the Rue du

Truand who hang on the skirts of the philosophers. Only it is funny to think that De Sartines is disturbed about you while you all the time—as I gather from your words—are preparing to expose one of those same revolutionaries.”

“Yes,” replied De Lussac, smiling and with his eye cast on the bureau, “it is strange, and I am certain of one thing: if my plans are successful I can promise Monsieur de Sartines a very great surprise.”

He spoke with spirit and animation and as though a weight had been taken from his mind.

The mercilessness of the maréchal and his chilly advice had removed his scruples. If ever men deserved the title of conspirators against the good of a state, surely it was these men who, for the sake of personal gain, were robbing a hungry nation of their food.

“Honor!” The word had no meaning in relation to them; they had placed themselves beyond the pale.

CHAPTER VII

WHILE MAHON MOUNTS GUARD

MONSIEUR DE RICHELIEU, when in residence at Versailles, received largely as a rule, but of late, or at least during the last few weeks, he had been very quiet, receiving few friends, visiting fewer, but constant in his attention at the functions of the court, and never missing from the big and little receptions, the levees of Versailles and the card-parties of Luciennes.

At this moment, in fact, things seemed coming to a crisis. The storm which on Christmas eve seven months later would sweep Monsieur de Choiseul and Monsieur de Braslin into exile seemed about to break, and at such a moment a man could not be too cautious, especially when that man was the Duc de Richelieu.

On the evening of De Lussac's visit, however, he had quite a large party to supper, the last of whom, no less a person than De Maupeou, the vice-chancellor, did not depart till close on the stroke of twelve.

De Lussac, bidding his host good night, proceeded to his room on the first floor, closed the door, lighted the candles upon the dressing-table and glanced at his own reflection in the great cheval glass that swung in its bronze frame supported by two bronze cherubs, one trampling upon a tortoise, the other upon an asp.

The window was wide open and the warm night air entered, bringing with it a faint perfume of lilac. As he turned from the mirror, there came on the wind from the night outside the stroke of a clock.

It was the first stroke of twelve from the great clock of the palace of Versailles.

He went to the window and, pushing aside the curtain, looked out.

The moonlight was broad upon the lilac boughs and the branches of blossom still but half-opened from the bud; he counted the strokes of the clock, they ceased, and complete silence took the night. He turned from the window and drew the curtain. The immense bedroom was hung with a tapestry representing Somnus and his thousand dreams—dragons, beautiful women, chariots, warriors, all touched vaguely by the light of the candles, while the great bed with its plume-decked canopy stood uninviting as a tomb.

De Lussac took his seat by the dressing-table, crossed his legs, folded his arms, and fell into a reverie. He would not start on his expedition to the library till one o'clock, so he had fifty-five minutes to wait.

As he sat like this, reviewing the business on hand, a sound from the corridor outside brought him suddenly to his feet. It was a footstep, and the footstep was followed by a knock at the door.

Almost before he could answer the summons, the door opened, and his host, attired in a *robe de chambre* of Chinese silk and bearing a silver candlestick in his hand, entered.

"You have not retired—good! I had something to say to you down-stairs, and De Maupeou with his long-winded conversation drove it out of my head. That man has the art of making one forget everything but the fact that one is bored."

Monsieur de Richelieu placed his candlestick on the table and, asking permission, took a chair.

"What I had to say to you was about the Austrian."

"The Austrian?"

"Madame de Linden, yes, the charming baroness from nowhere. People are coupling your names; have they any reason to do so?"

"Monsieur," began De Lussac, with some temper; he checked himself, and before he could resume the *maréchal* went on:

"It is impertinent of me to ask such a question. I apologize. There are affairs that no man has a right to interfere in, but I must tell you that the D'Harlancourt is spiteful about the matter and nothing would please her better than to do you an injury. So you see I came to-night into your bedroom to warn you, not to bore you with a lecture."

"I thank you, Monsieur."

"Madame la Baronne Linden," continued the old fellow, drawing his robe about him and laughing in a spiteful manner, "has set all these women in arms against her. Why? *Mordieu*, who can tell a woman's reason? She is different from them for one thing, she is a beautiful woman for another thing, and she has a tongue like a poisoned sword for another."

"A poisoned sword, oh, Monsieur," laughed De Lussac. "It is very easy to see that you are speaking from hearsay, not from knowledge."

"Monsieur," replied De Richelieu, "before you were born, I had lived fifty years in the world, and in those fifty years I learned never to speak from hearsay. I speak from knowledge. Have you ever

heard this lady from Vienna fighting a duel with her tongue?"

"No, Monsieur, I have not."

"I have."

"And her antagonist?"

"Antagonists, you mean. They were the Princess de Guemenée, the Comtesse de Coigny, and Chiffe."

"The Princesse Victoire!"

"Yes. They tried conclusions with her and she left them binding up their wounds. A wonderful woman, but scarcely a wise one."

"As how?"

"*Ma foi*, how? Look at the result! Instead of making friends, she is already being banned. They call her the adventuress; they have alienated the dauphiness from her; they have set rumors going about her; they are making Paris too hot for her—"

"Cats—," said De Lussac, "not one of them is her equal in worth—"

"Or wit, and that is where the trouble lies. Women can forgive brains or beauty in another woman, but not the combination. The empty skull hates the full one. Well, there you are, and I only say, be careful; for I tell you quite frankly, my dear cousin, that an amour with a lady so beautiful, so witty, and so—shall I say—unplaced in the social

world is a thing to be embarked on with caution. I am so much your elder that you will permit me to say be on your guard."

"Against Madame Linden?"

"No, Monsieur, against your own heart. You are a man with opinions of your own and very self-willed, for which quality I admire you. What I dread for you is a marriage which may do you infinite social harm."

"I thank you for your interest in my affairs," replied De Lussac.

As he spoke the words, the howl of a dog came from the night outside.

"It is Maréchal Turenne," said De Richelieu, rising to go. "He guards the house outside, while Mahon mounts guard within."

"Maréchal Turenne—what is he?"

"A wolf-hound, twin brother to Mahon. I must introduce you to them in the morning. Good night, my dear Armand, and pleasant dreams."

The old gentleman departed, leaving his guest standing staring at the closing door.

"While Mahon mounts guard within."

The words were ringing in his ears, and as if to give them emphasis, again from the night outside

came the deep-throated voice of Maréchal Turenne baying the moon.

So there was somewhere in the house, wandering loose, perhaps, a wolf-hound.

This was a complication he had not thought of. He was armed, as far as the rapier at his side went, but he was thinking less of his personal safety than of the fact that an encounter with the animal would raise the house.

For a moment he stood balked, as a man stands before some insuperable obstacle. Then his knowledge of dogs and their ways came to his mind. Mahon would already know of his presence in the house, would have smelt his traces, would, on seeing him fully dressed with a candle in his hand, know him quite well to be a guest, and would, a hundred to one, greet him as a friend, not an enemy; if he were an honest man-respecting dog all would be right.

If he were a rogue, and among dogs you find rogues who, outwardly respectable, will, while mounting guard over their master's property, on that pretext kill a man for the pure pleasure of killing a man; then everything would be wrong.

He knew quite well, too, that he must descend

the stair with sword undrawn, walking easily and without stealth. He knew that a dog takes note of everything, is a keen physiognomist, and has an eye for deception such as few men possess.

He knew that if Mahon were on a chain his psychology would be quite altered, and that at the first faint sound of a footstep he would rouse the house.

In that event detection would be certain. He could, of course, explain his position in several ways; say, for instance, that not being able to sleep, he wished to get a book from the library; still, the chances were that suspicion might be roused.

The single stroke of a clock at a distance came from the night outside. It was Versailles ringing the half-hour. He had intended to wait till one, but the anxiety was insupportable. He determined to act at once.

He took a lighted candle in his hand and left the room.

The corridor on which his door opened was lined with suits of armor and trophies of the chase; tusk of boar and eye of wolf gleamed as though the genius of ferocity in the masks had been drawn into points of concentration by the wan light of the candle.

The suits of armor became armed men.

The great staircase looked twice as broad as when seen by daylight, and the hall shot up at him dimly in great masses of shadow, luminous rays from the stands of arms, and a faint shimmer from the parquet of the flooring.

Not a sound or sign of anything living—or sight, till half-way across the parquet of the hall the light disclosed the doorway of the library, and before the doorway a mound of darkness.

A rolled-up carpet seemed to have been cast there; it was the dog.

The great wolf-hound was lying motionless, with paws outspread and chin resting upon them. His eyes were wide open and he was watching the man.

He had seen the dim glimmer of light, and on the stirring of air that came by way of the open window of the comte's room had scented the man who was approaching, recognized that it was the same man whose traces he had already perceived mixing with the traces of his master, Monsieur Beaupré, Monsieur Raffé and the servants, and that he belonged to the house and, though a new-comer, was to be respected.

Then he lay watching.

As De Lussac approached, the great dog heaved himself up, stretched ever so slightly, thus showing

that he was perfectly at ease in his mind, and moved aside from the door, seeing that the man was making for it and evidently wished to open it.

His tail hung motionless; he showed neither pleasure nor the reverse, nothing but absolute neutrality, and politeness, if one may use the term.

De Lussac knew better than to attempt any caress or blandishment. He was in the presence of a noble and kingly spirit which, while receiving him with severe courtesy as a guest of the house, was not yet on terms of intimacy with him.

Changing the candlestick from his right to his left hand, he opened the door of the library and entered the room. The dog followed close at his heels.

He placed the candlestick upon the little table, turned to the bureau, and paused.

The dog had passed him and taken up his position before the bureau, lying just as he had lain before the door.

A chill seized De Lussac. Mahon had admitted him to the library, for the library was a room, strictly guarded it is true, yet at the pleasure of visitors. But the bureau of De Richelieu was not common property; no one might have to do with it except the master of the house. Mahon had no

doubt been trained in this belief. To put the question to the test he approached it.

A sonorous rumble like the sound of thunder in the distance filled the room.

He stopped and the sound ceased. It was enough. Had the room suddenly filled with armed men, his defeat could not have been more complete.

He turned, took the candle and left the room, the dog heaving up and following at his heels. As he closed the door the dog flung himself down before it again, and De Lussac, crossing the hall, passed upstairs to his room.

His face was flushed and burning; shame and hatred of the business on hand filled his heart. For a moment the nobility of the dog made him feel as though he were a creature on a lower plane. Then the remembrance that what he was doing was not for himself but for others brought things to their proper level.

He would have to attempt the business by day, evading the eyes of men, those creatures far less faithful and sagacious than dogs.

One o'clock struck from Versailles as he turned to his bed. It was now Wednesday, and to-day at three o'clock he had appointed to meet the woman he loved at her house.

CHAPTER VIII

DE SARTINES OPENS THE LETTER

NEXT morning the Comte de Lussac was awakened by Roche, Monsieur de Richelieu's personal servant. The man was carrying a tray containing chocolate, which he placed on a table while he opened the curtains. Then he withdrew.

It was a lovely morning. The sunlight and the warm air, filled with the scents and sounds of spring, entered the room by the still open window. A bird was singing in the lilac branches outside.

To-day, at three o'clock, he was to meet the woman he loved. It would take him more than an hour to reach Paris; he would have to leave at a quarter to two. It was now nine o'clock, so that he had but five hours in which to carry out the hateful task of robbing his kinsman so that he might save his friends.

In that moment of keen perception which comes after sleep, he saw his position with clearness. He remembered the dog of the night before; that noble

head seemed set before him to show him the depth of his own degradation.

At the thought his eye fell on his sword lying on a chair near the window, and a wild impulse seized him to take it, place the point to his heart and fall on it.

But that would not help Barthelmy and Conflans in the power of the merciless De Sartines. He rose from his bed, and, having bathed in a bath set in a curtained alcove, dressed. Then, standing at the open window, he collected his thoughts and arranged his plans, assured only of one thing: his determination to carry the business through at whatever sacrifice.

Now, at this very moment, Monsieur de Sartines, standing before his bureau in the octagon chamber of the Hôtel de Sartines, was reading a report just handed to him by his lieutenant, Monsieur Beauregard.

"So," said De Sartines. "Madame la Baronne Linden left her house yesterday for Compiègne, taking with her her maid and the servant Placide, leaving behind her the cook, who is the only occupant of the house at present,—all this, and not a word from Lavenne. Fool that I was to trust him with this affair! No matter; fortunately, I did not

leave it entirely in his hands. Show in the agent who wrote this."

Monsieur Beauregard went to the door, opened it, and cried "Blanc."

Immediately, on the summons, a peddler entered the room, deposited his pack on the floor, bowed to the minister of police, and stood at attention.

"This is your report," said De Sartines. "What has become of Jondrin who was working with you on this affair?"

"Jondrin, Monsieur," put in Beauregard, "is still shadowing the Comte de Lussac. The comte, as I told you, entered his hôtel yesterday, having parted with Monsieur Fleury, and has not yet left it. Jondrin is still watching the place."

"Good," said De Sartines, utterly unconscious of the fact that not only had De Lussac left his hôtel, but that he was at the present moment at Versailles in the house of De Richelieu. "Good." Then turning to Blanc: "Madame la Baronne has left her house, then, in charge of only one servant?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"The cook?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"What sort of servant is she?"

"Oh, Monsieur, a terrible woman, as I know to my cost."

"How?"

"Why, Monsieur, I have been making love to her. She is fifty, with only one tooth in front—" this without the slightest attempt at jocosity, but simply as a soldier tells of his hardships.

"Is she practicable?"

"Why, yes, Monsieur, for our purposes; an excellent woman, entirely unfaithful to her mistress, whom she hates, for Madame la Baronne has a tongue of her own, and uses it on her servants."

"Good. You do not know when Madame la Baronne is due to return?"

"No, Monsieur."

"We must risk it. I shall search her house myself."

"Yes, Monsieur."

De Sartines ceased speaking for a moment, and paced the room, deep in thought, while Monsieur Beauregard and the agent stood without a movement, awaiting what was to come next.

The minister of police was a man who believed in a bold *coup* and the taking of risks. He had no direct evidence against De Lussac, but quite sufficient

indirect evidence to justify his arrest on suspicion. The affair had been irritating him for days; he had broken up the hive of the Society of the Midi, but he had not captured the queen bee; he had not seized important documents; he felt that De Lussac held the key of the position. He determined on an explosion.

"Go," said he to Blanc, "take another agent with you, return to the Rue Coq Héron. If you think this woman is to be trusted, tell her your plans and promise her five louis if your search is successful. Somewhere in that house there are papers hidden of the utmost importance to us; of this I am certain. Ransack all the rooms without leaving a trace of your work, but do not touch madame's boudoir. Leave that for me. I shall arrive before three o'clock. Should it be dangerous for me to enter the house you can give me warning when my carriage stops at the corner of the Rue Peysette."

"Yes, Monsieur," replied Blanc, and taking up his pack he left the room.

"And now for your part of the business," said De Sartines, turning to Beauregard. "Here is an order for the arrest of Monsieur le Comte de Lussac. Take it, and execute it."

"Am I to arrest him in his own house, Monsieur?"

"No," replied De Sartines, after a moment's thought. "I don't want a fuss; take him in the street."

"And should he resist, Monsieur?"

"Disarm him."

Beauregard saluted the minister, and turning on his heel left the room, folding up the order as he went and placing it in his belt, while De Sartines, taking his seat at the bureau and the *lettre de cachet* from one of the pigeonholes, filled up the blank space with the name of the Comte de Lussac. On the arrest of the comte, and his imprisonment in the Bastille, Monsieur de Launay would notify the minister of police and ask for guarantees, the *lettre de cachet* would then be forwarded, and all would be in order.

At twenty-nine minutes to three, precisely, Monsieur de Sartines descended the steps leading to the courtyard, and entered his carriage.

The coachman, who had his orders, whipped up, and the heavy vehicle passed through the gates and proceeded at a rapid pace to its destination.

At the corner of the Rue Peysette it stopped, Monsieur de Sartines descended, and, having given some directions to the driver, proceeded on foot down the Rue Coq Héron, walking slowly.

The gate, leading to the courtyard of Number 12, was ajar. He pushed it open, entered, passed up the steps to the front door and rang. Almost immediately the door was opened by Blanc.

"Well?" said the minister of police, as he proceeded across the hall to the stairs, followed by the agent, "Any news?"

"The search is still going forward, Monsieur, but we have discovered nothing yet."

"How many agents have you at work?" asked De Sartines, ascending the stairs as though the house were quite familiar to him, as, indeed, it was.

"Three, Monsieur."

"Good," said De Sartines, opening the door of the boudoir. "You can go and help them, and at the least sign of danger give me warning. There is a back way leading into the Rue Martell."

"Yes, Monsieur, and I have stationed agents at the end of the Rue Peysette, and both ends of the Rue Coq Héron, to give us news should madame return. They know her carriage."

"How are they to give warning?"

"By a blast of a whistle, Monsieur."

"Good! A blast on a whistle, but it seems to me that the Rue Peysette is long, and the Rue Coq Héron not short; at that distance—"

"Oh, Monsieur," said Blanc, with the satisfied air of a man who has foreseen everything, "one of the top windows is open, and at that window I have placed Valmajour, who has the ears of a hound, and who could pick out the police whistles from all the noises in Paris, even though they were blown at twice that distance."

"You have done your business well," said De Sartines, as he entered the boudoir of Madame Linden, while Blanc, delighted at this praise from a master who rarely praised, hurried down-stairs to superintend the doings of his subordinates.

De Sartines, when he entered the boudoir, stood for a moment glancing about him as though he wished to surprise the spirit of the place. He noted the bureau in one corner, the flowers in the vase between the windows, the ornaments upon the mantel, a fan that had been cast and forgotten upon the fauteuil. He was a past master in the game of hide-and-seek, and had Madame Linden been a man he would have directed his search toward carpet edges; he would have investigated the curtains, all those places where a man might secrete documents of a compromising nature; but he knew the instinct of woman for a lock and key; were papers to be found here they would be found most probably in some

secret drawer of the bureau, so he turned to it first. He had all the implements for scientific lock-picking in his pocket, but no use for them, as he found, to his disgust, that all the drawers were open.

There were four drawers to the bureau. Three were empty, and one was half filled with old letters and documents.

He removed the three empty drawers first, and with the rapidity and science of a skilled cabinet-maker examined them and the spaces he had drawn them from for secret caches; then he replaced them without finding what he sought, and did the same to the fourth drawer, with a like result. He examined the pigeonholes, and with a little tape which he took from his pocket measured their depth, contrasting them with the depth of the bureau, and all with such lightning-like rapidity that in less than five minutes he knew the thing as well as though he had made it, and could say with scientific certitude, "There is no secret repository here, no cache for anything bigger than a wafer."

Then this man of many parts, courtier, politician, maker of epigrams, with the swiftness of a clerk in his official bureau, and the dexterity of a conjurer, began to read and examine the papers in the last

drawer in such a manner that when he had finished not one would be out of place.

There were bills, receipted and unreceipted letters, chiefly from women friends in Vienna; letters from men, love-letters dated three years back, a ballad against himself—De Sartines—and a host of other papers, all unimportant. The last letter he opened was from a milliner, and it contained a pattern—a tiny snippet of gray material, triangular, and scarcely an inch long. He was glancing at the letter when a sharp tap came to the door, and Blanc appeared.

“Monsieur, madame is arriving. The signal has been given.”

“*Peste!* Go, get the others away. I will follow you.”

He folded the letter, replaced it in the drawer, closed the drawer and left the room.

Fate was against Monsieur de Sartines, who unconsciously had committed two grave blunders, almost inexcusable in a man of his carefulness and genius.

CHAPTER IX

THE HANDKERCHIEF OF SILK

SHORTLY after three the carriage of Madame Linden turned into the Rue Coq Héron, and drew up at Number 12. The courtyard was not large enough to admit a vehicle, and the cook, who acted also as concierge, on hearing a ring at the gate, would open by pulling a cord which connected the gateway with the kitchen premises; the visitor would then cross the courtyard to the front door, where Rosine or Placide, if he were about, gave them admittance.

Madame Linden entered and followed by Placide, who was carrying her traveling-bag, passed up the stairs to the first floor.

She was carrying a great bunch of hothouse flowers which she had bought at the florist's in the Rue St. Honoré, just by the passage giving entrance to the little Rue du Mont Thabor, and having placed these on the center-table, she ordered Placide to fetch her a bowl.

"And madame's traveling-bag?" asked the old fellow.

"You can place madame's traveling-bag in madame's room. Go, and let me see how young your legs can be."

She spoke to Placide very often as one would speak to a child. His age permitted it; besides, he, like herself, was an original.

She turned from the table to the clock on the mantel; it pointed to eighteen minutes past the hour. Then she passed to the nearest window, looked out at the Rue Coq Héron, and frowned.

De Lussac had promised to meet her here at three o'clock; he was eighteen minutes late. The fact that she herself was late for the appointment did not occur to her; the lateness of De Lussac was wholly inexcusable, unless something had happened to him.

As she turned from the window her eye caught sight of something on the floor by the bureau; it was a handkerchief. She crossed over to it, picked it up, and gave a little cry of surprise.

It was a man's handkerchief, a square of delicate Chinese silk, bearing in a corner a coronet and an undecipherable monogram embroidered in cardinal red.

As she stood with it in her hand Placide entered the room, a Sèvres bowl in his hand.

"Placide," said Madame la Baronne, "what is this?"

Placide put the flower bowl upon the table.

"*Ma foi*," said he, "it is a handkerchief."

"Dolt,—of course 'tis a handkerchief, but how did it come here? What is it doing here? Who dropped it?"

Without answering her, Placide took the handkerchief, looked at it closely and examined the monogram. As he did so an exclamation of surprise escaped from him. Then he laughed.

"*Ma foi*," said he. "What a fool!"

"Well?"

"Madame," said Placide "I have been in your service but a very few days, but in those days I have learned one thing—that you trust me."

"Well?"

"Madame does not know that trust is the greatest compliment a master can pay to a servant. I, as an old servant who has been in many places, can appreciate that compliment, and in return for it I will do you a service by giving you a piece of advice."

"Well?"

"My advice, Madame, is to be on your guard; you

are surrounded with spies and enemies. I would even say to you, do not leave for Vienna to-morrow or next day, but to-night."

The baroness listened to this extraordinary speech seemingly quite unmoved, but her eyes were fixed on Placide as though in him she were trying to read the riddle of this strange advice.

"And why?"

"Madame," said Placide, "this is the handkerchief of Monsieur de Sartines."

"The lieutenant of police?"

"Yes, Madame, the lieutenant of police."

"And how do you know Monsieur de Sartine's handkerchief?"

Placide laughed. "Madame forgets that I am an old Parisian servant. I was in the service of Madame de Stenlis a month; in the service of Madame d'Harlancourt for a week; with Madame de Greux till I left her to better my morals; with Madame de Gervais till I had no morals left. Here I found the handkerchief of Monsieur de Sartines under a chair, here under a bolster."

"Do you dare to say—"

"Oh, Madame, I say nothing against your honor. Monsieur de Sartines is compounded of a minister of police and a man of gallantry. It was not the

man of gallantry who left this handkerchief lying by your bureau—”

“But the minister of police?”

“I fear so, Madame.”

“Who came in my absence to spy upon me?”

“I fear so, Madame.”

“Why should I dread the minister of police?”

“Why should all Paris dread him, Madame?”

“I have nothing to conceal.”

“Perhaps madame has friends. I speak only for madame’s safety, but in these times one’s friends are sometimes one’s greatest enemies.”

Madame Linden paused for a moment in thought, then she broke out.

“It can not be. He is a gentleman, a noble. He—to come here as a common spy. Impossible! Impossible! To me, accredited to the court of France—to me. Impossible! Impossible! He must have called. Margot must have admitted him; she is stupid, and perhaps showed him up here. Go down and ask her. Quickly!”

Placide left the room and madame, placing the handkerchief on the table, turned to the bureau and opened the top drawer.

“No, everything is in order. Impossible! Impossible!”

Almost mechanically she had taken the top letter from among the papers in the drawer, opened it and glanced at the writing. It was from a working dressmaker, to whom she had intrusted the alteration of a gown, inclosing a pattern of the lining for madame's approval.

"*Ma foi*," said she, "I had forgotten this. I should have written to say that the color was correct, and now, without doubt, the dress will not be finished in time before I leave Paris. But where is the pattern of the lining?" The letter was just a square piece of paper folded after the fashion of the time. It had been fastened by a wafer. She distinctly remembered replacing the tiny pattern in the folded paper; what, then, had become of it? It was no longer in the letter.

She cast her eyes about, and there, on the floor, lay the incriminating pattern.

She stooped, picked it up, and at that moment Placide entered the room.

"Madame," said Placide, "Margot knows nothing of the matter." He ceased, and stood staring at his mistress. It seemed to him that she had changed, become another woman; an elder sister of herself. He glanced at the open bureau drawer.

"Madame has been robbed?"

“Robbed! I have been outraged. My papers have been tampered with, my letters opened. Oh, *mon Dieu!* That perfumed policeman; that spy in the coat of a minister; picklock, thief! Wait! Oh, wait and we shall see! I will go to the king. I will apply to the dauphiness.” She flung herself on the fauteuil and sat, leaning sidewise, beating the floor with her foot, pale to the lips, just as if anger had picked her up, flung her there and stunned her.

She, who had always been accustomed to men’s homage, to be treated like this by a great noble, a minister of state, a man whom she had seen at court and admired for his handsome face and magnificent presence! That she should be suspected was nothing, the fact that a government spy had tampered with her letters was nothing, but the thought that De Sartines had done this thing in person filled her with such a fury that for a moment the power of thought was destroyed.

Placide stood watching her, afraid to move, afraid to speak. Then he saw the color returning to her cheeks; her eyes, expressionless and fixed a moment ago, became bright, the hard look passed from her face, and the handkerchief which she had plucked from her breast, and which she had been twisting in her hands, fell on the parquet of the floor unheeded.

Placide coughed, but she did not hear him; she seemed plunged in thought of an exciting nature; her lips moved. Then, suddenly, she looked up.

“Ah, you are there—good. Go to Rosine and tell her she need not go on with the packing of my things. I shall not leave Paris just at present. Go to Vaudrin and countermand the horses I have ordered for my carriage. Then come back to me at once.”

“But, Madame!”

“Yes.”

“All arrangements have been made for your journey. When, then, will madame leave?”

Madame Linden laughed.

“I will leave when I have settled my account with Monsieur de Sartines.”

“Oh, *mon Dieu!*” said Placide.

“When I have brought him on his knees; when I have made him cry for pardon, and pay for his infamy; then I shall leave, and not an hour before.”

The old servant, who knew Paris so well and the power of De Sartines, was about to make some remark when she cut him short and waved him from the room.

“Go! I wish for no more words on the matter. When you have executed my orders return to me.”

He left the room, and as he closed the door her eyes fell on the clock on the mantel; it indicated twenty-five minutes past three. The remembrance of De Lussac, banished from her mind for a moment, returned only to increase her exasperation. Had he, too, played her false? Her mind, logical enough in the affairs of the head, was of that imaginative order which becomes feverish and illogical in affairs of the heart. For a moment she almost hated the man she loved. His failure to keep his appointment seemed to her a direct corollary of the insult offered to her by De Sartines. Ah! these Parisians, were they all, then, the same—flatterers, false gentlemen, nobles on the outside, lackeys at heart?

Even as she asked herself the question the doorbell sounded, Rosine's voice came from below, another voice, and then a step on the stairs.

A knock came at the door of the boudoir; it opened and disclosed De Lussac.

He was pale, exhausted, disheveled and covered with dust; he carried his hat in one hand, a riding-whip in the other, and as he stood before her, seized with a momentary vertigo, he dropped the whip and clung to the door for support. In a moment she had

seized him, and, supporting him, led him to the fauteuil, where he sat down.

"It is nothing," he said. "I am late, but I killed a horse on the road. It is nothing—"

"*Mon Dieu!*" she cried, "nothing—to be in this state? Do not move or speak till I come back."

She ran from the room and returned in a moment with some wine and food on a tray.

"When did you eat last?"

"This morning, no—last night—"

"'This morning, no—last night'! Why, that is the answer of a woman; and you are a man, and a man without food is useless as a child. You are a big child. No, not a word till you have finished what is on this tray."

She held it while he ate, watching the color coming back into his face and the life into his eyes.

"And now," said she, "you may speak. Wait till I place this tray upon the table—so."

She placed it upon the table, and drawing a chair beside him, sat while he told his story. He told all that we know: How he had met the chief of the Society of the Midi; how he had journeyed to Versailles to abstract the De Sartines document from the house of his kinsman, the Duc de Richelieu; how

the dog had foiled him, and how, on awakening that morning, he had felt such despair at the business in hand that the impulse came on him to throw himself upon his sword.

"However," said he, "I remembered that what I was doing was not for myself."

"And why," said she, interrupting him, "why should you not have done just the same for yourself? *Ma foi*, in dealing with these rogues the vilest weapons are justifiable, and it is only by such weapons we can meet them. Here are men who are starving the poor to feed their own pockets, men who *embastille* their enemies, and leave them to rot in prison; men who enter a woman's house and search her papers, read her letters; men without mercy, without heart, without conscience. These men must be met with their own weapons, as I hope to prove to Monsieur de Sartines before he is very much older. But go on, my poor friend; you are a poet, a man of kindly heart, a gentleman of the old knightly school; you do not understand these tricksters in the least. Go on, and tell me what happened then."

"I had decided," went on De Lussac, "that nothing could be done while Monsieur de Richelieu was in the house. I did not see him the whole morning;



"No, not a word until you have finished what is on this tray."

he was engaged, it seems, with his secretary in his own apartments. But at *déjeuner* he appeared, and you may imagine my relief on hearing him order his carriage to be got in readiness immediately after the meal to take him to the Duc de Choiseul's. He was very gay, and so filled with his own affairs that he did not notice my nervousness or want of appetite, and when he had departed I went to the library, telling the servants not to disturb me, as I had some important work to do.

"It was after one o'clock; the house was as silent as the tomb; neither dog nor man was there to oppose me, and I set to work."

The sweat started in beads on De Lussac's forehead while he paused, as if contemplating the terrible adventure of the day.

"You must remember that at any moment Raffé, or the majordomo, or even one of the servants who are so forgetful of orders might have opened the door; and I had to open drawer after drawer to its full extent, examine each paper they contained, and replace them. I have never felt afraid before, but while carrying out this business I was filled with terror and stupefaction. I worked mechanically, and like a man working in a dream; had any one entered I should have run my sword through his heart,

replaced the papers, hidden my disgrace, and then destroyed myself. It was this thought that gave me courage.

"And among all these papers there was not a sign of the document; it was by the merest accident I found it at last."

"You found it!"

"Wait—yes, I found it, behind a secret panel of the top right-hand drawer, a panel the existence of which I discovered by a chance which seems miraculous.

"The thing ought to belong to the history of the world, so that men might see the depth of infamy that man can descend to.

"It contains the names of fifty-six corn brokers, the amount of corn each of these has delivered, the amount of money paid him. The receipt for the corn is signed by De Sartines, the receipt for the money by the master broker.

"All this corn has been bought, to be sold at thrice its purchased price to a starved market and a starving people."

"But Monsieur de Richelieu—why did he hold the document?"

"He is the king."

"The king?"

"The king's intermediary; half of the money for the purchase of the corn has been supplied by the king. De Richelieu is the king's business man in the affair; his watch-dog over the rapacity of De Sartines and Terray, who was the inventor of the scheme."

"*Mon Dieu!* and this document?"

"Wait. I was seated with the open drawer before me, the document in my hand, amazed by my success, amazed by the infamy of these men, when, outside, suddenly sounded sharp and clear the voice of my cousin, De Richelieu. In a flash I folded the document, placed it on top of the papers in the drawer, closed the drawer, unable to lock it because I had taken the key from the lock, and, rising, was in the act of taking a book from one of the shelves when the door opened and the duc entered, followed by Raffé, bearing a pile of books and papers. De Choiseul, it seems, had been away from home; can you conceive such bad luck? The duc seemed still in splendid humor, and, evidently, he suspected nothing: he rallied me for staying in the house when the weather was so glorious outside, and, as I turned from the shelves, book in hand, he passed to the bureau and sat down before it, while Raffé spread its top with the books and papers.

“‘These are my half-yearly accounts,’ said the duc. ‘Raffé and I are going over them together, and I fear it will take us till supper-time. A weary business, and I fear we shall disturb you in your reading.’

“At that moment my eye fell on the clock, which stands on a little table near the window, and I saw that it marked three minutes to two. I remembered my appointment with you. I had forgotten it for a moment. I told my kinsman that I would leave him to his accounts, went to the stable, borrowed a horse and killed him half a league from Paris. I ran the half-league. I had not spared the horse; my only excuse is that I did not spare myself.”

“And you have left this document lying upon the other documents in the right-hand top drawer of Monsieur de Richelieu’s bureau?”

“Yes.”

“Why did you not thrust it into your pocket?”

For answer, De Lussac turned and showed her the pockets of his coat, pockets with heavily embroidered flaps, making it a work of difficulty even to insert one’s hand.

“The drawer was open before me,” said he; “nothing was easier than to place the paper in it and close it.”

"And you have left the drawer unlocked?"

"Yes; I had no time to lock it."

"And Monsieur le Duc is sitting there now doing his accounts and at any moment he may require some paper or other, take his keys from his pocket, insert one in the lock and find that the drawer is already unlocked. That will mean suspicion, search and discovery."

"Precisely. But the chances are that he will go on with his accounts. One must sometimes trust to chance."

"True," said Madame Linden, "and you came all the way back to see me, killed a horse, nearly killed yourself—"

"Yes; and I would have come twice the distance and killed two horses for one glance from your eyes."

He drew her to him and their lips met.

"And now," said she, "you are going back?"

"Yes. My work is easy now. If Monsieur de Richelieu has discovered nothing, I shall simply have to wait for a moment alone in the library, open the drawer, take from it the document, and close the drawer again. Then you may be sure that with it in my possession, I will not be long in returning to Paris, and then—"

"And then?"

"Woe to De Sartines."

"Woe to De Sartines," she cried, echoing his words with a little laugh. "Confusion to De Sartines! You have your plan against him, and I have mine." She rose, took from the table the handkerchief, which De Lussac had not noticed, and placed it in her pocket. The plan which she had formulated against the minister of police was of such a nature that she did not care to discuss it with the man she loved. This strange woman had no scruples in her dealings with the unscrupulous, no mercy in her dealings with the merciless, no pity for the pitiless. Yet, for the poor she was all charity, and for those who loved her and whom she loved her fidelity was deathless. Her quarrel with De Sartines was her own affair; she had determined to match him with his own weapons. No one had to do with this little business, not even De Lussac, the man she loved.

She turned from him for a moment, opened her dress, and, taking from her breast the letter she had received from him the night before, handed it to him.

"This is your letter; you had better destroy it. Had anything happened to you be sure I would have

unearthed the packet you spoke of, and revenged you afterward."

"The packet?" said De Lussac. "I said nothing about a packet to you." He opened the folded paper and read: "To-day I am burying in the earth of the first orange-tree tub on the right as you enter my courtyard, a packet of vital importance to the S. de M.—"

He read no further.

"But this is the letter I wrote to Monsieur Blanc. I wrote two letters, one to you and one to him—" He turned the paper over, and there, on the back, in his own handwriting, was the address:

Madame la Baronne Linden,
Villa Rose,
Compiègne.

"Heavens!—what a mistake! I folded the letters, sealed them, and then wrote the addresses. See, I have directed his letter to you, and yours—"

"To him," said she, laughing. "Poet, dreamer—what a wretched conspirator you make! And was there anything compromising to your Sophie in this letter misdirected to Monsieur Blanc?"

"Nothing. I only spoke of my meeting with Monsieur de Fleury, and of the business in which

it involved me, so that you might know, if I failed to keep our appointment, that it would not be my fault."

"Good," said she, "and, fortunately, your letter to Monsieur Blanc came safely to me, for if it had fallen into the wrong hands you would have been compromised, indeed." She said this, little knowing the effects that would follow on his error, and De Lussac, equally unconscious, folded the paper and placed it in his pocket. He was crimson at his own stupidity.

"Now," he said, "while fortune seems favoring us, is the time to act; I shall return to Versailles; if Monsieur de Richelieu has discovered the open drawer it will lead to questions. I can not lie, though it seems I can steal. I shall tell him he is a scoundrel, and he will tell me I am a thief. I shall pass my sword through his heart, and he will pass his through mine. *Bon Dieu!* I am beginning to have no scruples in a matter of life and death, nor care for anything but you."

He turned to her and embraced her.

"And I shall see you again?"

"Here," said she. "I have altered my plans, and shall not leave Paris as soon as I had intended. I have some business to do first. You will come here

at once if you are successful, will you not? The
door of my house is like my heart for you—”

“How?” asked he, her hands in his.

“It is open day and night.”

CHAPTER X

A MAN WITH FOUR IDEAS

HE left her house and, turning to the right, passed down the street, walking hurriedly, and heedless of the people about him.

As a matter of fact, in leaving the house of his kinsman and journeying to Paris to meet the woman he loved, he had committed a grave error. It is true that while De Richelieu was in his library nothing could be done, and that the duc, engaged on the heavy half-yearly accounts of his estates, would be there, perhaps, till the evening; still he should not have left such a desperate business to develop unattended. He felt this, now, as he thought of the five leagues separating him from Versailles, and he walked swiftly, making by the shortest cuts for the Rue de Valois.

His plan was to return home, take the swiftest horse from his stables and ride back to Versailles. He would have to account for the horse he had killed; this would be an easy matter; he could say,

simply, that he had left it in Paris, as it was unfit for the return journey. Walking swiftly, and engaged in these thoughts, he did not notice that he was being followed till a voice from behind made him start and turn.

“Good day, Monsieur le Comte.”

It was Monsieur Beauregard, Monsieur de Sartines’ lieutenant.

Monsieur Beauregard was a man of that magnificent type which seems to have been left to the Latin races as a legacy by the Roman consuls. Aquiline-nosed, heavy-jawed, imperious, his face, but for the mustache and imperial, might have been copied by nature from some coin of the Cæsars. Yet, it was a full-blooded face and kindly withal; the face of a man who eats and sleeps well, and is successful in life and love. He was a terrible lady-killer, this Monsieur Beauregard.

“Ah, good day, Monsieur Beauregard.”

De Lussac, though a very brave man, face to face with this charming lieutenant of Monsieur de Sartines’, felt his lips suddenly become dry as pumice-stone, and unconsciously exhibited that fatal sign which betrays the nervous and the guilty—he moistened them.

"What weather!" said Beauregard. "It might be June."

De Lussac assented, and they walked on together.

"Are you walking far?"

"Only to my house," replied De Lussac, "and you?"

"Oh, *ma foi*," said Beauregard, "it seems I am walking with you, going in the same direction. It is good to walk through Paris on such a pleasant evening as this."

A cold hand seemed to have fallen on the heart of De Lussac. Was this an arrest? He knew that against a man of his rank no common police agent would be used; he knew that the gallant Beauregard was most nice in his methods. He knew the character of Beauregard—a perfect gentleman, a good-hearted soldier: a man with four ideas—woman, duty, wine and food—and all the more terrible just because of this simplicity.

"It is strange," said De Lussac, "that I should meet you accidentally like this, and that our ways should lie together."

"Oh, *ma foi*, not so strange," replied the other, "for, as a matter of fact, my dear Monsieur De Lussac, I have been looking for you."

"Looking for me?"

"Yes, and delighted to find you looking so well. This is the Rue de Valois; why, 'tis but a step from the Rue Coq Héron; and there, as I live, is my carriage."

Not far from the house of De Lussac, drawn up by the pavement, stood a closed carriage heavily built, dark-colored and without crest or coat of arms on the door panels. Two powerful Mecklenburg horses were in the traces, and upon the box sat a coachman in a plain livery.

"Ah," said De Lussac, "you drive in a closed carriage on such a fine evening as this. Well, Monsieur, I can not commend your choice."

"I am not following my choice, but my duty, Monsieur," replied Beauregard, "and though my carriage is a closed one, and the evening is fine, I must ask you to take a drive with me; that, too, is my duty."

De Lussac stopped and faced his companion.

"Monsieur Beauregard," said he, "let us drop dissimulation. You arrest me?"

"You have said the word, Monsieur de Lussac, not I."

"By whose order, may I inquire, has this thing been done?"

"Monsieur," replied Beauregard, "all this falls

under the orders of the day. It is not my duty to give explanations, but, speaking unofficially, as Monsieur Beauregard to Monsieur de Lussac, I may say that one man only, save his majesty, has power to give me orders, and that man is Monsieur de Sartines."

"And if I resist?"

"Resistance would be useless, Monsieur; besides, you have noticed that on my part I have said nothing of a disagreeable nature; I have not even shown you the warrant which I hold in my belt. Dealing with a common man I would have clapped him on the shoulder, and he would have resisted, no doubt, but I have treated you as a gentleman, and gentlemen do not create vulgar brawls."

De Lussac's hand fell unconsciously on his sword hilt.

"Monsieur," said Beauregard, in a stern voice, "in the courtyard of the Hôtel d'Harlancourt, opposite there, I have stationed three armed men, the coachman on the box carries arms, my agents block both ends of the street; think twice before appealing to force."

De Lussac cast his eye on the Hôtel d'Harlancourt; at one of the upper windows a woman who had been gazing out withdrew hurriedly, but not

before he had caught a glimpse of her face. It was Madame d'Harlancourt.

Without another word he turned to the carriage; followed by Beauregard, he entered it, delivered up his sword, and the coachman, whipping up his horses, they started.

Partly stunned by the blow that had fallen on him, De Lussac for some time did not even glance through the windows to see what direction they were taking.

By his indiscretion in returning to Paris he had lost the game, he had sacrificed Barthelmy and Conflans, he had sacrificed, most probably, his own life and the love which had suddenly come to him, making life a thing to be desired. Monsieur de Richelieu would undoubtedly, before the morrow, find that his bureau had been tampered with, and would fix, rightly, the blame on him. All hope of help from that quarter was gone.

But all these considerations were eclipsed by the thought of how near he had been to success, and how far he had flung success away by his weakness.

The paper had been in his hands; it was there for the taking. Had he only waited! But sure of being able to see the woman he loved and to return before the duc had finished his work with Raffé, he

had gone off and left Fortune unattended. Fortune does not take insults like these without resenting them.

So he argued, utterly unknowing himself, or the fact that the mainspring of the motive that had driven him to Paris was less Madame Linden than the deep unrest, the nerve strain that made movement imperative; made it absolutely necessary that he should leave the house of De Richelieu, where, for the time being nothing could be done.

Then, with an effort, he shook off this paralysis of mind which had seized him, and glanced through the window of the coach.

They were in the Rue St. Honoré passing eastward, that is to say, in the direction of the Rue St. Antoine and the Bastille. The carriage, leaving the Rue St. Honoré, passed down a street parallel to the Rue des Halles, entered the Rue St. Antoine, and pursued its eastward course. De Lussac, though burning with the question that was in his mind, remained dumb. He was afraid to ask their destination lest his voice should betray his emotion. That the Bastille would prove the end of their journey he felt certain.

More certain still was he when they passed the church of Petit St. Antoine on the left, the Fon-

taine St. Catherine and the Rue Beautrellis. As they passed the Hôtel de Mayenne, De Lussac, pressing his face to the window and glancing upward, saw, cutting the sky, a tower gray with age, and touched by the last rays of the setting sun. It was the northernmost tower of La Bastile.

Half a minute later the carriage stopped, and De Lussac heard the voice of the coachman answering the challenge of the sentry. They had reached the drawbridge giving entrance to the courtyard of the fortress.

Where the Rue St. Antoine met the outer engirdling wall of the Bastile it narrowed, skirted the wall, and gave exit from Paris by the Port St. Antoine, an arch gateway with three gates opening on the Rue de la Contrescarpe. Immense, gloomy, gray, facing the west with four towers, facing the east with four towers, fronting Paris like an eternal menace, backed by the Fosse de L'Arsenal, the Rue de la Contrescarpe, the wood-yards and fields leading to the Hôtel des Mousquetaires Noirs, the fortress of the Bastile stood, at once a stronghold and a symbol.

La Force was as gloomy, Vincennes as strong. In the ancient chatelet men had been far more barbarously used than in the Bastile. That may be, but

the Bastile it was that rode the imagination of the people; on that burning July day when the fever of the Revolution rose to a crisis it was the Bastile that the people attacked. It was the concretion in stone of all the evil of all the kings of France, and their monument. The very market porters felt this.

De Lussac, an imaginative man, shared the feeling of the people, and as the carriage rumbled across the drawbridge, it seemed to him that in the growl of the wheels he heard the voice of the Bastile, ventral, deep, fatal to hope, indifferent as the voice of a jailer.

“So! another prisoner; pass him on.”

They passed through a courtyard, and were again checked by sentries. De Lussac could hear their harsh voices as they challenged, and the coachman's reply as he showed his permit, and drove on through a gateway, and across another courtyard to a doorway.

This doorway, the main entrance for prisoners, possessed a door iron-studded and a foot thick. It stood half open, and guarded by sentries who were already apprised of the entrance of the carriage, and as Beauregard descended and gave his arm to his prisoner the sentries presented arms, and from

somewhere in the deep recesses of the fortress came the hoarse clanging of a bell.

It was the bell that announced to turnkeys and sentries the arrival of a prisoner. At its sound all corridors would be cleared, prisoners returning from exercise would be hurried along to their cells, the governor would be summoned, and the clerk who had to deal with the books of the prison. De Lussac, following Monsieur Beauregard and followed by a sentry, passed along a stone corridor to a door barred, bolted and studded with nail-heads each as big as a child's fist. A turnkey, who had already removed the bars and slid the bolts, opened the door, and, as they passed through, it closed behind them, and the clang of the bars replaced came faintly and in a muffled manner speaking of the door's thickness and strength.

This corridor which they had entered was faintly lighted, and led to the room of audience, where prisoners were received by the governor, and it was in this corridor that De Lussac encountered something more depressing than the thickness of the walls, the strength of the doors, or the gloom of the corridors. It was the smell of the Bastille.

La Bastille had a faint and poisonous breath of her own that, once encountered, endured in the

memory for ever; whether from fungus in the cellars, oubliettes, and dungeons far below the fortress, or simply from the very antiquity of the stone and mortar, who can say, but the faint toad-like odor remained, ineradicable as the evil of her maiden.

De Launay, the governor, was absent, and Monsieur Vitry, the deputy governor, filled his place. He was seated at a desk, and close to him stood a clerk over a huge book placed on another desk, was the clerk whose duty it was to enter the name of the prisoner, his station in life, his offense and, what was of most importance to the unfortunate, the remarks of the authorities about him. These secret reports, unseen by the prisoner, unseen by all but God, the governor and the clerk, were, in themselves and of their own nature, an infamy. By virtue of them a man might be held for ever; or at least until his death, a prisoner lost and forgotten. It did not matter in the least that his family were starving, that his wife and his loved ones were in despair; the secret report cared nothing for this.

He might hope against hope, see the spring cast a brighter beam of light on his wall, feel that with the warm breath of summer through the bars of his window release must surely come. The secret writing in the book below held him in its wizard spell.

"Very dangerous—to be kept in the strictest confinement."

Governors might change, kings die, the man's very offense be forgotten, but through the gloomy days of winter, the bright days of spring, those words would hold him prisoner still, unjudged and forgotten.

When the Bastille was destroyed men were found like this, some of them idiotic. Tavernier could not remember for what he was imprisoned. He had forgotten himself as completely as the authorities had forgotten him.

De Lussac watched the face of Monsieur Vitry, who was finishing a letter on which he was engaged, and who did not even glance up. He had seen De Launay, the governor, but he had never till this met Monsieur Vitry, who was the type of Monsieur D'Estrelles, and the prototype of the modern bureaucrat.

Monsieur Vitry finished the last line of his letter, signed it, sanded it, and folded it—all with the precision of mechanism—addressed it, and placed it in the tray on his desk, struck a bell, pointed to the letter when a soldier answered the summons, and ordered the man to take it to its destination.

It was a letter relative to some defect in the new

uniforms of the Swiss, a trifle, but just as important to Monsieur Vitry as the fate of De Lussac.

Then he turned his face, pale, narrow, and seeming even narrower by reason of the heavy wig he wore, upon the new-comers.

He bowed to Beauregard, who returned the salutation, glanced at De Lussac and took a paper from the table. It was the *lettre de cachet* which we have seen the king handing to De Sartines in blank.

Just before Beauregard accosted De Lussac he signed to an agent who was following him, and the agent had started hotfoot for the Hôtel de Sartines, received the *lettre de cachet* and conveyed it to the Bastile.

It had arrived a few minutes before the prisoner.

"You are the Comte Armand Jean de Lussac?" said Vitry.

"Yes, Monsieur, that is my name."

"Residing in the Rue de Valois?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Good," said Vitry.

He rose from his desk, passed over to the clerk, bent with him over the big volume, talked for a moment in an undertone and then returned to his desk, where he sat down, striking the bell as he did so.

A turnkey entered.

"Third Bertaudière, number 23, corridor number 7," said Vitry, handing the man a slip of paper on which he had been scribbling.

The turnkey, paper in hand, turned to De Lussac; but before he could speak the comte made a step toward Vitry's desk.

"Monsieur," he said, "I have been arrested, I have been brought here, and it seems I am to be imprisoned. I have only one question to ask. Why has this been done?"

"Monsieur," replied Vitry, "all questions and complaints must be addressed to the governor, Monsieur de Launay."

"When can I see the governor?"

"When? To-morrow, perhaps; but it is not necessary for you to see him; questions or complaints can be addressed to him in writing."

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried the unfortunate young man. "I am then imprisoned without reason given, and I may, perhaps, see the governor to-morrow. O, Monsieur, beware of what you do! An injustice like this is a crime. I ask, simply, what I have done that I should be seized like this and imprisoned, and you give me an answer which is no answer. You refuse to tell me."

The man of parchment at the desk turned to the jailer who had now opened the door.

"Number 23, corridor number 7," he said.

"Follow me," said the jailer.

De Lussac looked round him as though he were looking for sympathy or help. Then, with a gesture impossible to describe, he followed the officer. In the corridor some one touched him on the shoulder. It was Beauregard.

"Courage, my friend," said the big man, "your case may not be so bad as you suppose. You have always your kinsman, the Duc de Richelieu, to fall back upon."

That was the last straw, and De Lussac scarcely heard Beauregard saying good-by, as the lieutenant of De Sartines turned away bound for light and air and freedom, leaving his charge to follow the jailer.

This personage, who wore the semi-uniform of the state prisons and carried at his belt a heavy bunch of keys, led the way along the corridor till they reached a door, iron-studded and made hideous by a lock of enormous size, and of such a complicated nature that it took the jailer a full minute in opening, yet there were locks in the Bastille so complicated, constructed with such horrible ingenuity,

that it would take at least five minutes to master them.

The jailer held the door open for De Lussac to pass through, and they ascended a circular stone staircase. The walls of this place were fungus-grown and still showed stains caused by the torches of the archers, *arbalétriers*, and musketeers of past ages; the steps were tread-worn by the feet of generations of prisoners, guards and jailers.

They passed through another corridor till they reached a stairway.

It led to another corridor, half-way down which the jailer halted, took the bunch of keys from his belt and opened a door.

De Lussac saw before him a square stone cell lighted by a window, high placed, and protected by heavy iron bars. A bed stood in one corner, a table in the center, and a chair by the table. A pitcher of water stood upon the table.

There was no other furniture at all.

As he stood for a moment before entering this place, suddenly, from away down the corridor came the ghost of a voice; high-pitched, cracked and faint as though strained through some microscopic opening. It was singing the verse of a song common in the streets of Paris some twenty years before. De

Lussac, shivering, entered the cell, drew the chair from the table and sat down.

"Your supper will be brought to you at eight," said the turnkey, speaking for the first time. "Should you care to pay you will be well served; you can even have wine. What money have you?"

"I do not want wine. Bring me paper, pens and ink."

"Paper and pens—what for?"

"I wish to write to the governor."

"That's what they all say," replied the man in a grumbling voice. "Well, if it amuses you, you can have your paper and pens, but they cost money."

De Lussac took a louis from his pocket and gave it to the jailer.

"That will pay you. When can I have them?"

"At eight o'clock."

"But I must have them at once."

"Patience," replied the jailer.

He glanced round the cell in a perfunctory manner, went out, and shut the door. With the closing of the door came the click of the lock, and then absolute and perfect silence.

The prisoner could not even hear the footsteps of his jailer retreating down the corridor. Like the fortress of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, which still

exists to the shame of civilization, the Bastile had one supreme and crowning terror, its silence.

Silence had been built into the place by the masons who labored at those walls thirty feet thick. Silence, old as the times of Louis XI. Silence, complete and steadfast like this, has a personality, at least during the first few hours of one's acquaintance with it. It seems to be listening and at the same time observing one. De Lussac, fresh from the sounds of the streets, and the voices of people, sat for a little while without moving, listening, scarcely breathing.

Then he rose to his feet and walked up and down the cell trying to find refuge in thought. But his thoughts were enough to drive a strong man to despair. He saw De Richelieu sitting at his bureau engaged in his accounts. De Richelieu would, in the course of the next few hours, inevitably find the drawer open, and the infamous document lying on the other papers. He would know to a certainty that he—De Lussac—had opened the drawer, found the document, and worst of all, read it.

It was a secret that concerned the honor of the king, as well as De Sartines, and that meant imprisonment for ever for De Lussac.

Then the vision of Sophie Linden rose before

him; the woman who had shown him what a fair thing life is to those who love.

"God!" cried the unfortunate, as he looked around him at the mean and sordid cell, the walls of granite blocks four feet square, the bed, the bare table, the hole in the wall that went by name of window.

There would be rainy winter afternoons that would creep into long winter nights; hot summer days would pass over the Bastille, bringing nothing here. And men would say: "Oh, the Comte de Lussac! Let me see; he died, did he not? Or at all events disappeared, but that was twenty years ago." And there would be no one to put them right, not even the Comte de Lussac himself, still perhaps living, white and old; still, perhaps, biting his nails in number 23, corridor 7.

He pushed his table under the window space, mounted the table, and with a great spring managed to jump and seize the window bars.

Clinging for a moment, he looked out. He saw the battlemented top of a monstrous gray stone wall, cutting the vague light of the evening sky. His cell window, in fact, looked out upon the larger of the two inner courts of the Bastille. As he looked, the silhouette of a man passed along the battlemented

top of the wall. It was a sentry. Could De Lussac have taken his stand for a moment on those battlements the hopelessness of any attempt to escape would have been shown to him to complete his despair.

He would have seen below him to the west the five-storied houses of the Rue Jean-Beausire and the Rue de Tournelles,—lofty houses, yet dwarfed by the Bastille to toys. The spires of Saint Marie, Saint Catherine, Saint Merri, Petit St. Antoine, the Célestins by the Pont de Gramont, and Saint Paul by the Rue Beautreillis; all lofty spires, but dwarfed to insignificance.

He would have seen the whole of Paris from Pin-court to Porcherons, from the Faubourg St. Jacques to La Ville L'Evêque. The Isle St. Louis and the Isle de la Cité, with the towers of Notre Dame in the distance; the Isle Louvier beyond the roofs of the Grand Arsenal, and, away to the east, beyond the wood-yards and fields bordering the Rue de la Contrescarp, the old Hôtel des Mousquetaires Noirs, vague in the mist of the fields. All these he would have seen, as the birds saw them in their flight.

He dropped from the window on to the table, replaced the table in the center of the cell, and sat

down beside it with his face buried in his hands. Years seemed to have passed since that moment but an hour ago, when, walking in the street, a voice behind him had said, "Good day, Monsieur de Lusac."

CHAPTER XI

PARIS FALLS ON MADAME

MADAME LINDEN, standing at the window of her boudoir, watched De Lussac as he took his departure. She saw him crossing the courtyard, and as the gate closed behind him she turned to the table where Placide had placed the Sèvres bowl and the flowers.

Utterly unconscious that the hand of De Sartines was about to fall on the man she loved, she occupied herself, as she arranged the flowers in the bowl, with the completion of her plan against De Sartines.

The insult that the minister of police had just placed on her by making a search at her house, and tampering with her private papers, had brought to a head her feeling of bitterness against the whole court of France; against the men false and polished, and those women, faithless, futile, and ferocious in their connivances, whom it had been her lot to meet.

She would have felt more bitter still had she known how, during the last few days, rumor had

busied itself with her and her affairs. It was already known, in some miraculous way, that De Sartines considered her attainted, that his hand might fall on her at any moment, and it was said that an order of deportation was already drawn up, and was only waiting the signature of the king.

As she stood arranging the flowers a knock came to the door and Rosine entered.

"Monsieur de Joyeuse to see you, Madame."

"Oh, Monsieur de Joyeuse to see me? Well, show him up."

Rosine vanished and reappeared a moment later, holding the door open.

"Monsieur de Joyeuse."

De Joyeuse entered and bowed to Madame la Baronne. He was exquisitely dressed, simpering, an almost perfect fool in appearance; in reality, a cold libertine, calculating, mathematical even in his vices.

"Why, Monsieur," said the baroness, as he kissed the tips of her fingers and released her hand, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

"On my part, Madame," replied De Joyeuse, casting his eyes over his own reflection in the long mirror on the wall, "the pleasure has been heightened by expectancy."

He took his seat on the chair madame indicated and which gave him full command of the mirror, crossed his legs, played with his eye-glass, and admired himself languidly while she went on with the arrangement of her flowers.

"And Madame de Joyeuse," said the baroness, "how is she?"

"Oh, *ma foi*," replied this ideal husband, in a weary tone of voice, "she is just the same as ever, Madame—sixty-two."

"Sixty-two! Why. I would not have guessed her for more than sixty when I last met her. And do you always herald your answers as to your wife's health with a statement of her age?"

"*Ma foi*, yes. It saves trouble. 'Monsieur de Joyeuse, how is your wife?' 'Madame, she is sixty-two.' Is not that far shorter than saying: 'Thank you, Madame, my wife has a touch of the rheumatism, she is garrulous with old age, and has the temper of a fiend?'"

"And you married your wife, Monsieur—"

"For her money, Madame. I am frank. Otherwise I would be eternally fighting duels to force down men's throats the lie that my wife is eighteen, and that I married her for her face."

"Monsieur," asked the baroness gravely and in

a solicitous voice, "I trust you find that mirror comfortable?"

"Quite, Madame," replied the imperturbable De Joyeuse. "It is almost a perfect fit, though with regard to the lighting of the room, it is unhappily placed."

"Poor mirror!" murmured Madame Linden as if to herself. "It seems to me it is having a very absurd reflection cast upon it. Now, see, I have no water for my flowers unless some one fetches it for me. Dear Monsieur de Joyeuse, would you like to be usefully employed?"

"No, Madame."

At this moment a tap came to the door and Rosine entered with a ewer of water.

"I have brought you the water for the flowers, Madame."

"Thank you," replied the baroness. "You have saved Monsieur de Joyeuse from disturbing his reflection in the mirror. Place the ewer on the table."

De Joyeuse ogled Rosine as she obeyed the baroness' order and withdrew. Then he rose from his chair.

"My reflections are finished, Madame. May I assist you with your flowers?"

"Thank you," said she, "if it will not incommode

your color effect, you may hold this rose." She handed him a rose, just as a person hands a child some trifle to keep it quiet, continuing her plan against De Sartines with one side of her mind while the other side occupied itself with the flowers and De Joyeuse.

She could not imagine why he had chosen to pay her this visit, nor did she particularly try. This fashion-plate that was still able to speak and walk almost amused her; she scarcely placed him in the category of men. Yet the fashion-plate, holding the rose to its nostrils, stood, watching her every movement, studying the graceful lines of her figure, approving her.

"Your occupation reminds me of the latest *ballade* on the Du Barry, Madame. It is being circulated all over Paris; the whole court is convulsed and the king is furious."

"At the convulsions of the court?"

"No, Madame, at the confusion of the Du Barry."

"Repeat me the *ballade*."

"Madame, it is unprintable."

"*Ma foi!* I did not ask you to print it. And since when, Monsieur, has it been the custom of gallant Frenchmen to turn women to jest in ribald

ballades and glory in the fact? I am an Austrian, as you perhaps know, and your customs are strange to me."

"I know nothing of *ballade* writers, Madame. They live, I believe, in the Rue du Truand and die in the ditches of the temple—if they are lucky enough to escape the hangman of Monsieur de Sartines."

"Ah!"

"What is the matter, Madame?"

"A thorn pricked me. Are you acquainted with Monsieur de Sartines?"

"He is one of my friends. But it is not of Monsieur de Sartines that I came to-day to speak, but of myself."

"Of yourself?" cried Madame Linden, laughing and drying her hands on her handkerchief. "*Ma foi*, Monsieur, what strange subjects you choose for conversation!"

"Madame," said De Joyeuse, quite unmoved. "I am your friend."

"Indeed? I am glad to hear that."

"You have many enemies."

"Who has not?"

"Bitter enemies."

"Are there such things as sweet ones?"

"Enemies who speak evil of you. These are dangerous times, Madame, and I have come to offer you—"

"Yes?"

"My protection."

"Your protection!"

"Yes, Madame," replied the fashion-plate, utterly deceived by the manner of his vis-à-vis. "My heart and, if need be, my purse."

"Your purse?" said she, ignoring his heart.

"Why, yes, Madame; and a well-filled purse at that. I am direct, you see."

"You are, indeed," replied she with a sweet smile. "Go on."

"You have charmed me. Another man would have come to you and said, 'Madame, you have charmed me; allow me to offer you my services and my purse,' whereas I—"

"Whereas you have paid me the insult first and the compliment after. One moment! You have heard people speaking, you have heard me called an adventuress, you have heard this and that, and you have said to yourself, 'Here is an adventuress, without friends. She pleases me and I will make her my mistress.' One moment! You pride yourself on your directness, do you not? Well, so do I."

She seized the half-filled ewer of water from the table and discharged it full in his face. Then seizing it by the handle, she raised it with the intention of breaking it on his head; but he was already at the door, and next moment had vanished. She heard his footsteps on the stairs and knowing it was hopeless to reach him there, she ran to the window and opened it.

Next moment she saw him crossing the courtyard, half-drenched, half-running, half-bent. It was loathsome, though to an unthinking mind laughable, to see how that dash of cold water had washed away the dandy and brought the cur to light. He was not perhaps a coward as the times went, but he was entirely dominated for the moment by the woman with the ewer.

As he crossed the courtyard she called at him as one calls after a dog, threatening it. Then she shut the window, replaced the ewer on the table and gave a last touch to the bowl of flowers. She was disturbed in her mind. Her reputation must have gone very much to the bad in the last few days, else De Joyeuse would never have dared an insult like that. She began to perceive for the first time, fully, how deeply she was hated in this society dominated by women and that odious woman-worship which

makes a Frenchman the puppet of his mistress, and degrades the worshiped and the worshiper alike.

"Well," she murmured as she rang the bell for Rosine to remove the ewer and to wipe up the water on the floor, "what do I care for their hate as long as I have his love!"

She spoke quite unconscious of the fact that De Lussac was at that moment being driven to the Bastille in the safe custody of Monsieur Beauregard.

CHAPTER XII

MADAME ASSERTS HER DIGNITY

PLACIDE answered the bell.

“Ah!” said the baroness. “So you have returned! See, I have spilled some water. I have been washing a dog. Fetch a cloth to wipe it up, and you can take the ewer away. No parcels have come for me, I suppose?”

“No, Madame.”

The old man went off with the ewer and returned in a moment with a cloth.

She took it from him, went down on her knees and mopped up the water on the parquet.

“My legs are younger than yours,” said she. “Here, take the cloth. I am going out, and should any parcels arrive for me, tell Rosine to place them in my bedroom.”

“Yes, Madame.”

“Stay,” said the baroness. “What is that?”

Voices sounded from below stairs, and in a moment Rosine came running up.

"Monsieur Boehmer has called, Madame."

"Boehmer, the jeweler?"

"Yes, Madame?"

"Ah, he has brought my necklace. Run down and show him up."

Rosine disappeared, and in a moment returned, ushering in Boehmer. Placide left the room, and madame found herself alone with the jeweler. Boehmer was a Hebrew, a German Hebrew, very stout, soberly yet richly dressed, with a blazing diamond on the middle finger of his left hand, and a most seductive smile presided over by a commanding nose. He was very well-to-do. Jeweler to the court, he held a good many secrets in his keeping. Losses at cards brought many of the nobility to Monsieur Boehmer; he lent money on good security and sometimes even on bad. He was gracious to every one without pretense, for he had a good heart; he was charitable out of business and had been known to give money to those to whom he had refused a loan. But in business he had no heart at all.

"Good day, Monsieur Boehmer."

"Good day, Madame."

"You have called about the diamonds?"

"Madame," said Boehmer, taking a parcel from

his pocket, "I have brought them. The necklace is complete."

He took from the parcel a velvet-covered box, opened it, and exposed to view a superb necklace of pure white stones, each a fountain of fire.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* how beautiful!" cried the baroness.

"Is not it sweet?" said Boehmer, moving the casket so that the gems shone and flashed and leaped before the fascinated eyes of the purchaser.

"Quite. Excellent workmanship! I must congratulate you, Monsieur Boehmer."

"Thank you, Madame."

She held out her hand to take it.

"And the bill, Madame?" said Boehmer, without relinquishing the stones.

"Ah! the bill. Sixty thousand francs, I think you said the price would be?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Well, I will pay you before I leave for Vienna. You said it would not be necessary to pay on delivery."

"Unfortunately, Madame, when I said that I spoke without the consent of my partner, Monsieur Bostang, and since then we have had some very heavy liabilities to meet."

"Oh," said the baroness; "you have had some very heavy liabilities to meet?"

Before Boehmer could reply, a knock came at the door and Placide entered.

"Madame," said Placide, "Monsieur Behrens has called and wishes to see you."

"Behrens, the haberdasher?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Show him up." Then, turning to Boehmer, "You mistrust me. Take your jewels away and keep them till you hear from me."

"Oh, Madame, you are—"

"I am the Baroness Sophie Linden, a woman of her word. Good day, Monsieur Boehmer."

"Madame, if you will but listen to me—"

"Good day, Monsieur Boehmer. Ah, Monsieur Behrens, come in."

Behrens entered, bowing, while Boehmer, astonished, half-angry, half-filled with admiration for the woman who had treated him so cavalierly, bowed himself out. A woman of the court would have raved or wheedled, promised, threatened. As he descended the stairs, his acute mind told him he had been misled by the rumors he had heard; that this woman was to be trusted; but it was too late now to rectify matters, so he took his way back to his

shop, nearly certain that the jewels would be taken and paid for in the end.

"Well, Monsieur Behrens," said the baroness, "and my gowns?"

"They are finished, Madame."

"And my hats?"

"Oh, Madame, they are not hats—they are creations."

"And my bill, is that, too, a creation?"

"Your bill is forty thousand francs, Madame."

"A large sum, Monsieur Behrens."

"Oh, Madame, forty thousand francs! What are they to the conquest of Paris?"

"So you think my hats will conquer Paris?"

"Madame, the rose flamingo hat, alone, would conquer Europe."

"Well, these conquerors of yours—have you brought them with you?"

"Oh, Madame, so many hats and gowns! One can not carry those in one's pocket. They shall be sent to-night."

"That is well. And see that they are packed properly for traveling. Good day, Monsieur Behrens."

"But, Madame, there is my bill."

"Ah, true; your bill. I thought we had spoken of

that. You told me it would be unnecessary to pay on delivery and that I could arrange with you before I left Paris."

"When did I say that, Madame?"

"When! When I ordered the things."

"When you ordered the things?"

"Certainly."

"Madame, there must have been some mistake. As for myself, I am entirely at Madame's disposal, but I have a partner, Monsieur Bompard—"

"I know. You mistrust me. Well, return to Monsieur Bompard and tell him to keep the hats and gowns till I send for them."

Behrens, inarticulate for a moment, seemed endeavoring to tie himself into knots.

"If Madame will excuse me—"

"With pleasure," said she, opening the door. "Good day, Monsieur Behrens."

"Ah, but, Madame—"

"I have nothing more to say to you on this subject at present. Later on I shall communicate my wishes to you."

Behrens, for once in his life dumb, retreated, bowing. He had nothing to say. Rumor had been talking to him, too, about Madame Linden, and he was quite determined not to deliver over the ex-

quisite dresses, some at three thousand francs apiece, the marvelous hats for which his house was so famous, without payment on delivery.

Madame Linden, having closed the door, went to the window and looked out across the courtyard at the street and the passers-by.

Outwardly quite calm, she was raging inwardly. She had more than sufficient money to pay Boehmer and Behrens; absolutely honest in her dealings with tradespeople, she would have paid the jeweler and the haberdasher at once had they not come with their claims immediately after the conduct of De Sartines and the insult of De Joyeuse; she felt that Paris was falling on her, that the tradespeople were only following the example of their masters and that the fountain and origin of all this was De Sartines.

She was all the more bitter, as she had intended wearing the necklace that evening at a reception to which she had been invited by Madame de Stenlis.

While she was standing thus a knock came at the door, and Placide entered with a note.

"From Madame de Stenlis, Madame."

She opened it, read it, and gave a cry as though some one had wounded her.

"Madame de Stenlis regrets that, owing to sudden indisposition, she will not be at home to-night."

Then, a little farther down:

"To Madame la Baronne Linden."

All the other vexations and insults she had received that day paled before this. The form of the thing was so abominable; spurious politeness covering deathly insult.

"Placide," said his mistress, crumpling the paper up and casting it into a corner of the room, "you can tell Rosine that she need not trouble to arrange my toilet for Madame de Stenlis' reception."

"Yes, Madame."

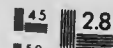
"Then go to Vaudrin and order my carriage to be sent round at a quarter to eight."

Left alone, she took the handkerchief of De Sartines from her pocket and glanced at it as a soldier glances at his weapon.



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PART II



CHAPTER I

THE MINISTER MAKES LOVE

IN THE time of his majesty King Louis the Fifteenth the nobility dined at four o'clock and supped at eight; the king dined at five and his supper was served at nine; the common people, when they dined at all, sat down to table at two.

Monsieur de Sartines, to mark his position beneath the king, but closer to him, by virtue of his office, even than the Duc de Choiseul, dined at half past four and supped half an hour later than the nobility—that is to say, at half past eight.

At half past seven on the day of De Lussac's imprisonment Monsieur de Sartines, who had dined badly, owing to business preoccupations, was seated before his bureau in that octagon chamber of the Hôtel de Sartines where we have seen him interviewing the agent, Lavenne, while beside him stood Monsieur Beauregard.

“Good,” said the minister, who was seated sideways in his chair, which he had turned slightly

away from the bureau so that he might converse the more easily with his lieutenant. "And he made no resistance?"

"None, Monsieur."

"No attempt at bribery?"

"None, Monsieur."

"No appeal to be allowed to return to his house for clothes and linen? They usually do that when they wish to destroy themselves, as in the case of Wattelet; or to burn papers, as in the case of De White. You remember the case of De White?"

"No, Monsieur" replied Beauregard, flushing, for the case of De White was a sore point with him, as he had been the officer in charge of it, and the prisoner, taking advantage of his good nature, had succeeded in destroying certain documents which De Sartines had very much desired to possess.

"You saw nothing of the woman, Madame Linden?"

"No, Monsieur. I followed him to her house. He entered and remained there some time. As he left I followed him again, accosted him, arrested him and conveyed him to the Bastille, where he now is, safe in the keeping of Monsieur Vitry."

"Monsieur Vitry?"

"Monsieur De Launay was absent, Monsieur."

"Well, Monsieur Vitry is a very good substitute. That will do. Any news of Lavenne?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Well, he is dismissed, but should he turn up, send him here that I may give him his dismissal in person."

Beauregard withdrew, and De Sartines, raising his voice, cried, "Germain!"

A door in the paneling of the room opened and a man dressed in black entered. He had evidently risen from a desk in haste to obey the summons, for he held a pen in his hand. Germain was De Sartines' private secretary and factotum, an oddity who was at the same time a perfect machine. He was as trustworthy as a well-constructed mechanism but quite without initiative.

"A special messenger to take this despatch to Monsieur Beaupré, the governor of La Force. You remember my saying of the forger Beaujon, 'I will find him out, I will catch him, I will hang him'?"

"Yes, your Excellency."

"Well, that's his death sentence, signed by the king. I never go back on my word. Here, take this other despatch and send it by special messenger to the governor of Vincennes; it's for De Valliers. I promised him his release if he gave information

on the Matthieu affair, and I never go back on my word; take it."

Germain took the document and left the room by the door leading to his office just as a stroke of the usher's wand sounded at the door opening on the corridor.

"Lavenne has returned, Monsieur."

"Ah," said De Sartines, glancing over his shoulder at the usher. "Lavenne has returned, has he? Show him in."

A moment later Lavenne made his appearance.

De Sartines turned his chair half round, crossed his legs, and looked straight at the agent, who, standing near the door, did not advance farther.

"So," said De Sartines, "it is you."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Come to report yourself?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And take my orders?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Then take them. You are dismissed. Begone!"

"But, Monsieur—"

"I told you that if you did not report to me by a certain time this afternoon and bring me evidence in the De Lussac affair that I would dismiss you. Now, listen to me. I am not a master who demands

impossibilities. I imposed the time limit on you as a punishment for the manner in which you allowed yourself to criticize my methods. You sneered at Gaussin, an able man who, at all events, did his best, and you—what have you done? You have done nothing.”

“Excuse me, Monsieur.”

“Silence! I do not wish to hear the tale of your deeds. I have had to dip my hands into this affair myself. Monsieur de Lussac is in prison and the matter is ended.”

“*Mon Dieu*, Monsieur!” cried Lavenne, “what is this you tell me? Monsieur de Lussac in prison?”

“Silence! I wish to have no more to say to you. Go!”

“But, Monsieur, will you not listen to just one word?”

“Not half a word! Begone!”

Lavenne dropped his head, contemplated the pattern of the parquet for a moment, then, with the ghost of a smile on his lips, he bowed profoundly to the minister of police, turned, and left the room.

De Sartines went to the bureau, opened his snuff-box and took a pinch.

“Scamp! That will teach him. ’Tis a pity, too, for the fellow was not without cleverness—”

He turned, for Germain had just entered the room.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur—"

Whatever Germain was about to say was cut short by a knock at the door leading to the corridor. The door opened and the usher appeared.

"A lady has called, your Excellency, and desires an interview."

"I can see no one," replied De Sartines, glancing at the clock. "I have a letter to write before supper. What is her name?"

"Madame la Baronne Linden, Monsieur."

"Madame Linden!" cried De Sartines, starting slightly. "Tell her—" He paused for a moment as if undecided. Then he made up his mind.

"I will see her."

The usher vanished.

"Now, what can this mean." He turned to Germain, who had not left the room.

"Which, Monsieur?"

"This visit?"

"I don't know, Monsieur."

"Blockhead! Go, leave me." He turned, and as Germain vanished into his office the door opened and the usher's voice announced: "Madame la Baronne Linden."

Never had the door of the octagon chamber formed so perfect a picture as that which now greeted De Sartines' eyes.

He had seen Madame la Baronne several times before this, but always at a distance; now, close to him, he could appreciate fully her charm. He bowed low as the usher closed the door.

"Good evening, Madame."

"Good evening, Monsieur. I must apologize for this late visit, but my business is of so urgent a nature that I could not wait till to-morrow."

"Madame," said De Sartines with that perfect falseness which was one of his charms, "I have had three pleasures to-day. The first was an interview with his majesty, the second an act of charity which heaven graciously permitted me to perform, and the third—"

"Yes, Monsieur?"

"The pleasure of seeing so charming a lady in this grim room."

"Oh, Monsieur. not so grim."

"Since you entered it," replied he, bowing.

Madame Linden took the chair to which he waved her, sat down, sighed, and cast her eyes about her.

"Perhaps, indeed, Monsieur, it will be grimmer when I leave it. For they say that even the ugliest

woman takes something charming away with her from a place where she is no longer."

"Madame," said De Sartines, "a woman can never take anything more charming away with her than that which she brings."

"Then, Monsieur," replied she, "in my case you must reverse your opinion, for I bring a very uncharming thing with me."

"And what is that, Madame?"

"An accusation."

"An accusation against whom, Madame?"

"Your agents of police, Monsieur."

De Sartines paused for a moment as a chess-player pauses over a move. He pushed an arm-chair from the wall, then he took his seat.

"From your lips, Madame," said he, "even an accusation is charming. And what have my poor police been about that you should accuse them?"

"Monsieur," replied the baroness, "to-day, in my absence at Compiègne, they ransacked my house in the Rue Coq Héron, upset the furniture, turned my escritoire inside out, and, as a matter of fact, a hundred thousand francs' worth of jewelry is missing. Neighbors saw the police agents enter the house, and they can testify."

The amazing impudence of this move struck De

Sartines like a blow under the belt, which, in fact, it was.

"Madame," he cried, forgetting prudence for the moment, "my agents upset nothing. There were no jewels to be stolen."

"That is to say, if there had been jewels they would have been stolen," laughed the baroness. "Take care, Monsieur; you are making confessions. Oh, Monsieur, why try subterfuge with me? Listen! I can prove that your agents came to my house to-day and entered it like thieves; I can prove that I opened my escritoire only to find no jewels there—a nice tale, Monsieur, to be laid before his majesty, at whose feet I am quite prepared to cast myself, assured as I am of his justice."

De Sartines checked the anger that was rising in his heart. He rebuked himself in the presence of a most formidable antagonist.

"My police did not enter your house, Madame. Had they done so, they would not have tampered with your jewels. Policemen are not thieves."

"Since when, Monsieur?"

"Madame," said De Sartines, "repartee is not my business."

"So I should imagine," said the baroness, with a little laugh. "You have other work to do, perhaps."

You are the guardian of the public honor; I can quite imagine how full your hands must be. I come to you as the guardian of the morals of Paris, and I ask for the restoration of my jewels and the punishment of the offenders."

"The police have not got your jewels, Madame."

"Oh, Monsieur, their value will do."

"Madame, the police have not got your jewels."

"When the king hears my story, he will think differently. I do not know what the police have done with my jewels, but I will take their value."

"*Diable!*" cried De Sartines, incensed by this childish reiteration. He would have ordered her from the hôtel had he not felt that behind this assassin's attack on his purse there was a power and a motive he could not yet gage; besides, the fascination of her unconsciously held him. She was a new sensation.

"Did you speak, Monsieur?"

"No, Madame; I was only thinking aloud."

"I thought I heard the name of one of your friends. No matter; let us return to business. Shall we say a hundred thousand francs?"

De Sartines rose to his feet, paced the room, pulled down his waistcoat and suddenly turned to his visitor.

"Did you speak, Madame?"

"Shall we say a hundred thousand francs? That is the exact worth of my jewels."

De Sartines laughed. The nobleman suddenly vanished and the minister of police appeared.

"A hundred thousand devils! I have caught you, Madame! Not a word of our conversation has been lost. All has been recorded by my secretary, Germain, who sits in the adjoining room, and who, at my direction, has listened while I led you into your own trap. So you would rob me! Germain! Ho there, Germain!"

The door opened, and Germain, pen in hand, appeared.

"You have heard our conversation, Germain?" asked De Sartines, with a slight grimace that was quite lost on the secretary.

"No, Monsieur."

The baroness broke into a joyous little laugh, and De Sartines, suppressing his anger with a tremendous effort, waved Germain from the room.

As he turned again to the baroness, the face of this extraordinary man had completely changed. He was laughing now as if tickled by the joke against himself.

"*Mordieu!*" thought the baroness, "what an ac-

tor! Let us beware!" Then to De Sartines, "Well, Monsieur—and my jewels?"

"Upon my word, Madame," said De Sartines, "your wit seems to have increased the stupidity of my servants. 'Tis enough to make one call a truce. The difficulty between us has been that we have not been quite frank one to the other, have we? I admit it on my part. Now, I will show my mind to you."

The baroness laughed. "Heaven help me to meet the sight," murmured she, casting her eyes up to the ceiling.

"I will show you my heart."

"Oh, Monsieur," cried the baroness, still laughing, "it is useless, for I have left my magnifying-glass at home."

"I will do, Madame, for your wit and beauty what I would not do for money."

"Oh, Monsieur, beware of promising the impossible."

"I will explain to you this affair. First of all, I admit that the police have visited your house."

"Germain!" cried the baroness. "Ho there, Germain! Are you listening?"

De Sartines held up his hand.

"Information reached the police that a thief was

in your house. They went there in search of him; they arrived too late."

"Why did you not tell me this at once?" asked she, more to gage De Sartines' capacity for lying than for any other reason.

"Because, Madame, it is a rule at the bureau of police to say nothing of the work of the office. Had you been able to assist us, you would have been apprised of the affair. And that reminds me; now that you are here and have given this information, I must ask you for an exact list of all these jewels you say you have lost."

He watched her narrowly as he said this, but her face did not alter in the least.

"With pleasure, Monsieur; take a seat and a pen and I will dictate."

De Sartines, amazed at her aplomb and coolness, took his seat at his desk and a pen.

"A necklace of forty-one diamonds, set in two rows of twenty each, each diamond divided from its fellows by a double chain of gold; the hasp formed of a single diamond set in heavy gold and with my initials, 'S. L.', on the gold; value at the very least, forty thousand francs."

"Forty thousand francs," murmured De Sartines, completing the sentence. "Yes, Madame; proceed."

She did; rings, bracelets, brooches, she described all with such minutiae that the unfortunate De Sartines, whom she had turned into a scrivener more hardly driven than those of the palace of justice, began to ask himself if, after all, her tale might not be true. But only for a second—there was mirth in her voice, laughter scarcely disguised. It was no part of her plan, seemingly, to delude her enemy whom she was keeping busily employed with the tale of her fictitious jewels.

The avariciousness of De Sartines was well known.

“Well, Madame,” said De Sartines as he finished writing, “that is all, and the total amounts to one hundred and twenty thousand francs.”

“I will forego the twenty thousand francs,” replied she; “and now, Monsieur, that we have set the account between us on a definite footing, may I ask you one question? Were you of the search-party that visited my house this afternoon?”

“I, Madame! I, the Comte de Sartines, seeking for thieves in person! Madame, do you know to whom you are speaking?”

“Yes, Monsieur, to the owner of this handkerchief.” She took the handkerchief from her pocket and held it toward him.

De Sartines clapped his hand to his pocket.

"My handkerchief!"

"Left at my house."

De Sartines saw in a flash the toils in which she held him. He could not seize her or take the handkerchief from her by force; accredited as she was by the court of Vienna, violence and bullying were out of the question. She would doubtless back her assertion of the robbery of the jewels by false witnesses, produce the handkerchief, and no doubt accuse him of the theft.

Now, absurd as such an accusation might seem, his thousand enemies in Paris and at Versailles would seize on it.

The very knowledge that it was false would make them more ferocious in their ridicule; there would be a public inquiry. De Maupeou, the vice-chancellor, who hated him; the courtiers, who hated him; the people, who hated him; the philosophers, the ballad-mongers, the rag-pickers—he saw them all arrayed against him. His imaginative mind saw the ballads that would be written round the "dropped handkerchief of Monsieur de Sartines." Confident of his own position and power, he had no fear of the result. He would bring as many false witnesses as his antagonist; but he did not desire the scandal of

the affair and the laughter. Therefore he temporized. Besides, an idea had come to him. He laughed.

"Faith, Madame," said he, "you have disarmed me."

"With a handkerchief!"

"No, Madame, with your wit. Replace that handkerchief in your pocket, I pray you. There is no doubt but that we shall come to terms, and to further our better understanding of one another, I will confess that the police visited your house to-day, not to search for a robber, but for political reasons."

"Ah!"

"You see, I am perfectly frank. I will tell you even more; they found nothing. Madame, their visit was not directed against you. I have no quarrel against you—only one piece of advice to give you: do not, charming as you are, mix yourself in these political movements that are on foot in Paris. Save yourself while you may."

He took a seat near her. His voice had become friendly. The baroness, but for her deep knowledge of men and her intuitive knowledge of De Sartes, might have fancied that all this was real. Profound as himself in deceit and even a better actor, she listened while he went on.

"You will forgive me the visit to your house when I tell you I forgive that glittering fable of the jewels. Oh, don't misunderstand me. You have caught me fairly enough, and I suppose I must pay. We will arrange all that." He spoke in a preoccupied manner. Then leaning forward, he took her hand.

"Well?"

"Upon my word, Madame, I do not know how to say what is in my mind. You are the only woman who has ever got the better of me, yet I do not hate you for it. Madame, the minister of police is no longer before you. Know you not, Madame, that every man is double?"

"Of that fact, Monsieur, I am well aware."

"Till beauty touches him and he becomes single," De Sartines continued.

"So men say, Monsieur, but, alas, when beauty ceases touching them—"

"Yes?"

"They become double again in a trice."

"That is true," laughed De Sartines, playing with the rings on her fingers; "we are but human."

"And being human," said she, relinquishing her hand entirely to him, "that is why we err."

"Then, Madame," said De Sartines, his hand

straying to her wrist, while his knee touched hers, "you, at least, have never erred."

"And how so, Monsieur?"

"Because you are divine."

"Oh, Monsieur! If I thought you were serious, I would think you—may I speak my mind?"

"Speak."

"A fool."

"A fool!"

"Or in love."

"I have been a fool, Madame," said he, his hand straying to the curves of her forearm, "but you have cured me of my folly. I matched my wit against yours and you have cured me, I say, completely of my folly."

"I am then your physician?"

"Most lovely creature—yes."

"After the bolus comes the bill, Monsieur."

De Sartines made a face.

"The bill!"

"Yes—a hundred thousand francs."

"Listen, Madame. Monsieur de Maupeou the other day told me this story. A physician attending a patient for the quinsy, cured him of the quinsy, but infected him with the croup. He presented his bill for the quinsy, and the patient, who, by the way,

was a lawyer, presented, in turn, his bill for the croup. It was argued before the courts, and each claim was allowed. Therefore neither protagonist got anything: You have cured me of folly, most beautiful physician, but you have infected me with admiration. Therefore we are quits and free to arrange our money affairs on the basis of common understanding."

"Monsieur," said the baroness, suddenly cutting him short, "*the handkerchief is not in that pocket.*"

De Sartines sprang to his feet. "Madame, I was not searching your pocket. My hand was on your waist." He now stood before her the picture of virtuous indignation.

The baroness laughed.

"Enough, Madame," replied the man of masks, dropping the mask of the lover and reappearing again as the minister of police. "You have charged my agents with a misdemeanor; your charge will be investigated. You have charged me just now with an ungentlemanly action. I have had enough of your charges, Madame. Our interview is closed. What are you waiting for, pray?"

"For your purse to open."

"Ah," said he, suddenly assuming a brutal tone, "you persist? Now, listen to me. Your doings are

known to me and the doings of your lover, Monsieur Armand de Lussac, whom I seized to-day as he left your house, and whom I sent to cool his ardor for politics in his majesty's fortress of the Bastille. Beware, Madame, that I do not deal with you as harshly."

She had risen to her feet and at these words the color fled from her face. He had hit her at last.

"Well, Madame," said he brutally, enjoying the effect of his speech, "what have we to say to that?"

She did not answer for a moment.

Up to this she had been playing a comedy. The hundred thousand francs which she had determined to make De Sartines pay for his visit to her house would have been presented, with an epigram, to the poor of Paris. Not once during all his pretense of admiration did he deceive her; she had borne with him only from the knowledge that she was sitting firmly on the handkerchief and that it would be impossible for him to get it. She had let him go on just as one lets a child go on in its attempt to steal jam, up to that point when the cupboard door is reached. She had enjoyed the situation hugely.

And now, at a stroke, her comedy was turned to tragedy.

The "perfumed policeman" had been victor all

through. While she had been wasting time fooling him, De Lussac, locked away in the Bastile, had been checkmated and prevented from returning to Versailles. The document was no doubt still lying in the top right-hand drawer of Monsieur de Richelieu's bureau and Monsieur de Richelieu was no doubt still seated at the bureau, engaged in dealing with his half-yearly accounts. At any moment he might take out his keys, attempt to open the drawer, find it already open, and discover the document. He would at once know the culprit; no one but De Lussac had been given access to the room.

She saw De Lussac with his weapon taken from him. She saw him a hopeless prisoner for life. That terrible contract which involved the dishonor of the king was a state secret, and the man who had knowledge of it would never be forgiven his knowledge. De Lussac must be freed at once. It was quite possible that Monsieur de Richelieu might not open the drawer of his bureau that night, or even on the morrow. She glanced at the clock. It pointed to twenty minutes past eight.

CHAPTER II

THE PERFIDY OF PLACIDE

SHE turned to De Sartines.

"Monsieur," she said, "you have spoken the truth. The Comte de Lussac is my lover."

"Well, Madame," replied De Sartines, walking to the bureau and taking a pinch of snuff, "what is that to me?"

"Listen to me, Monsieur. To-day, when I discovered that you had visited my house, I was filled with anger. I said to myself, 'I will make Monsieur de Sartines pay for this. I will make him give me a hundred thousand francs, which I shall present to the poor of Paris as a present from Monsieur de Sartines.' Monsieur, my anger against you is vanished. Take my weapon."

She took the handkerchief from her pocket and handed it to him.

It was not till then that she appreciated the cold and polished brutality of this nobleman, who, without a word, and taking the handkerchief gingerly,

as though it were contaminated, cast it into the waste-paper box by the bureau.

Then he took his seat at the bureau and, as if forgetful of her presence, began to write. She came up close to him.

"Monsieur."

"Well, Madame?"

"You have to-day imprisoned an innocent man, a man who has no fault but his own goodness, a man incapable of real danger to the state. Ah, Monsieur, I know him! He is a child at heart. He may have been misled, I do not know; but this I know, he is unworthy of prison. Monsieur—"

De Sartines looked suddenly up.

"Madame, I am engaged on my correspondence; our interview is closed. You are talking of some one. To whom do you refer?"

"Monsieur," she went on patiently, "I refer to the Comte de Lussac."

"Madame, if you wish for information on that point, I must refer you to Monsieur Beauregard. It is an affair of the police."

"Alas, Monsieur," said she, "I know that I have offended you, and for that I beg your pardon. You are all-powerful—"

Then, in broken tones that would have moved the

heart of a statue, she began to plead for the liberty of De Lussac. The thought had come to her that if she could only get him freed she would take him away at once across the frontier. If she could only get him freed before the fact was known that he had tampered with the document and discovered its contents, she would take him away, leaving the document to look after itself. Full well she knew that the moment De Richelieu opened the top right-hand drawer of his bureau De Lussac was lost for ever. So she pleaded, in that wonderful voice which had above all voices the power to reach the heart, and De Sartines, sitting with his elbow resting upon the bureau, seemed plunged deep in thought.

He seemed attentively considering what she was saying, weighing the points one by one; sometimes he would make notes on a piece of paper.

She ceased, and pen still in hand, the minister of police remained still silent and lost in thought. Then, breaking from his reverie, he stretched out his hand and struck a bell that was standing before him on the bureau.

Germain entered the room.

“Yes, Monsieur?”

De Sartines referred to the notes he had been making.

"I have been going over in my mind the whole of Monsieur de Tracey's complaints. When he calls, you can tell him that the matter does not fall within the province of the ministry of police."

"Yes, Monsieur."

Madame Linden caught her breath as though some one had struck her.

"Monsieur!" she exclaimed, as Germain left the room.

"Why, Madame, you are there still!" said De Sartines. "Well, what is it now?"

"You will not, then, listen to me?"

"Madame, it seems I have been listening to you for half an hour. I have nothing more to say. Our interview is closed."

"You refuse to hear me. You treat me with disdain. Very well then, Monsieur." She paused. A vivid idea had suddenly flashed across her brain. "Very well, then, Monsieur. From this moment we are enemies. Beware!"

She moved toward the door.

"Beware! No man has ever insulted me as you have done. Beware!"

He turned his head. She had vanished from the room. Outside she passed along the corridor like a whirlwind, down the stairs, across the hall, where

the guards and Swiss soldiers were on duty, to her carriage, which was still waiting.

"Home," she cried to the coachman, "and as quickly as you can drive."

She looked at her watch. It pointed to half past eight. The project she had suddenly evolved was a dangerous and desperate one. If successful, it would free De Lussac and make her absolutely mistress of the situation. If it failed, it would make her a state prisoner for life. Vienna could not protect her from the effects of its failure. Yet she did not shrink from it in the least, and her brave heart knew no fear. Instead, she felt intoxicated with the desperate nature of the venture in which she was about to risk all.

Arrived at her house, she ordered the coachman back to Vaudrin's to say that a traveling-carriage and two swift horses should be sent round at once. She rang for Placide, but he had not yet returned.

Then she put herself into the hands of Rosine, and as nine o'clock was striking she came downstairs fully dressed in evening attire, covered by a light cloak. She got into the carriage that was waiting for her, and as Rosine closed the door on her she cried to the coachman, "Versailles; to the house of Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu."

Meanwhile De Sartines, left to himself, sat for a moment deep in thought. Then he struck the bell sharply on the desk, and Germain answered the summons.

"Well, fool!" cried his master, "what made you answer me like that when I asked you if you had not overheard our conversation?"

"I was in doubt as to your meaning, Monsieur, and when in doubt I always tell the truth."

"Ass! could you not see that I was suggesting to you a lie? Truth! What have you to do with the truth? Stay; who is that? *Entrez.*"

It was Monsieur Beauregard.

"Monsieur," said Beauregard, "an old man has just called. He asks for an interview with you. I have spoken to him but he will not give his business."

"Tell him to begone," said De Sartines. "I have finished business for the day and am going to supper."

"Very well, Monsieur. Only I ought to tell you he is the servant of Madame Linden, who has just left you."

"Ah, her servant you say? That is another matter. Have him shown up."

Beauregard vanished and a moment later the door

opened again, and Placide made his appearance, shown in by the usher.

Placide entered cautiously, glancing about him as an animal glances who fears a trap. As the door closed on him he bowed to De Sartines, and then stood hat in hand without advancing farther.

"You wish to see me?" said the minister of police, envisaging the old fellow for a moment. "You wish to see me?"

"That, your Excellency," replied Placide, "is my desire."

"It is accomplished. What next?"

"I wish, Monsieur, to render you a service."

"Then render it by explaining yourself quickly, for my time is not my own."

"Monsieur," replied Placide, coming forward closer to De Sartines, "I am in the service of Madame la Baronne Linden. I am also in her secrets." He laughed and paused for a moment.

"Proceed."

"I am not satisfied with my mistress, Monsieur."

"A common complaint with servants. Proceed."

"The other day, Monsieur, I discovered that the police were making inquiries about Madame la Baronne. An agent of police, disguised, attempted to enter the house by making love to Rosine, the

maid. She repulsed him, and I had the honor to assist, with a bucket of water. Well, Monsieur, I said to myself, if the police are so anxious to find out something about Madame la Baronne, there is perhaps something to find out."

"One moment," said De Sartines. "What is your name?"

"Placide, Monsieur."

"Go on."

"Well, Monsieur, heaven has given me a fine nose for hunting out intrigues, and I said to myself, 'Here is your chance of obtaining a post in the police agency, where the pay is . . . Monsieur de Sartines is trying to find out something about madame. Let us try if we can't help Monsieur de Sartines. Now,' I said to myself, 'in a case where you want to find out anything about a woman, look for the man. Whom does madame favor most? Why, the Comte de Lussac.'"

"Aha!" said De Sartines, beginning to feel some respect for the miserable old sinner who seemed to glory in the betrayal of his mistress. "And did you follow the Comte de Lussac?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur. I stuck to my mistress. She left Paris for Compiègne, taking me with her as well as the maid Rosine. We had scarcely been two

hours at the Villa Rose—for that was the name of the house where we were staying—when a messenger from Paris arrived on horseback, with a note for madame.

“The messenger was Jasmin, Monsieur de Lussac’s confidential servant.

“I it was who opened the door and took the note; madame was in her bath, and I promised to deliver it to her as soon as she was visible.

“I opened the note, Monsieur, and it was of such an extraordinary nature that I made a fair copy of the contents. This is it.” He took a folded paper from his pocket and handed it to De Sartines, who read:

“To-day I am burying in the earth of the first orange-tree tub on the right as you enter my courtyard a packet of vital importance to the S. de M. Should I be arrested, or should I die, show this letter to Jasmin, my valet. He is entirely to be trusted. Unearth the packet and make use of it as your wisdom sees fit.

“Signed,

ARMAND DE LUSSAC.”

“*Mon Dieu!*” said De Sartines, casting his eyes again over this most vital piece of writing. “And what did you do with the original?”

“I gave it to Madame la Baronne,” replied Pla-

cide. "It was only the egg-shell. I had abstracted the meat."

"Did she notice that you had tampered with the letter?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur; I am not such a bungler in my work as that."

De Sartines had now in his hand the means of obtaining those papers of the Society of the Midi which he knew to exist and for which he had been hungering. He had not only De Lussac fully in his power, but De Lussac's mistress, the Baronne Linden, by attainment. But the deep satisfaction that filled his mind left him quite unenthusiastic as to Placide, the fount and origin of this precious information.

The perfidy of Placide did not occur to him at all in relation to the information, nor did it mar his satisfaction. But when it came to the question of reward, Placide's perfidy shocked Monsieur de Sartines and chilled his tone as he said, "This information may be important as a means for carrying out the ends of justice. We shall see."

"Yes, Monsieur," replied Placide, without moving an inch. "I think you will find it most important. And now to the small question of my reward."

"You have done your duty to the state," replied

the minister. "Let your reward consist in the satisfaction of that thought. There is no question of reward. All citizens are required to assist the police in protecting the social order. Well, what are you waiting for?"

The old villain seemed completely taken aback by this cool pronouncement; his beard wagged, his mouth opened and closed. Then, to De Sartines' astonishment, he began to laugh.

"Oh, Monsieur," said he, "the only reward I require, is for you to say, 'Placide, you are in my service,' with, of course, the ordinary police pay for my services, which, added to my salary, will not be so bad."

"Oh," said De Sartines, "you can serve me every day, if you like, as you served me to-day. *Ma foi*, if that is what you want, the thing is done. Placide, you are in my service."

"Thank you, Monsieur."

"Now you can go," said De Sartines. "Continue to keep your eyes open and apply to Monsieur Beauregard for your salary, starting from yesterday. He will pay you weekly in advance."

Placide left the room, and De Sartines summoned Monsieur Beauregard.

"Monsieur Beauregard," said De Sartines, "go at

once with half a company of guards to the house of Monsieur le Comte de Lussac, in the Rue de Valois. Surround it, arrest all the servants, place a man in each room; should your entrance be contested, break the doors down.

“Immediately you enter the courtyard, examine the first orange-tree tub on the right; examine it carefully, to see if the soil has been disturbed. Then, with your own hands remove the soil and bring me the packet of papers you will find concealed there. It is of vital importance. It is concealed in the mold. Do not fear to dirty your hands.”

Beauregard laughed.

“And the servants, Monsieur?”

“Have them all removed under a strong guard to the conciergerie; and by the way, that old scoundrel who has just left the room—enter him on your payroll as an agent, and pay him the first-class agent’s salary weekly in advance.”

“Yes, Monsieur.”

Beauregard saluted and went out.

CHAPTER III

ROSINE TELLS TALES

PLACIDE left the Hôtel de Sartines and took his way to the Rue Coq Héron.

He had no need to ring. Rosine was at the gate, taking the air, glancing up and down the street. It was a lovely evening, warm and perfumed with the scent of flowers from the little gardens behind the Rue Coq Héron.

The instant Placide's eyes fell on Rosine standing at the gate of the courtyard he knew that Madame la Baronne must be out.

"Well, idler," said Rosine, "where have you been? *Ma foi!* but when Madame la Baronne returns you will catch it."

"So madame is out? Where has she gone to?"

"Versailles." She moved back, for Placide, with a pretense of mock gallantry, had attempted to slip his arm around her waist. Placide was a fine example of the snuffy old man-servant common in the families of the lesser nobility of that age. The old retainer, a product of feudalism, impudent with

family pride, insolent to the lower orders, making love to the maids and stealing his master's snuff; open of speech, garrulous, and licensed to be drunk on holidays; often dominating the household as old servants sometimes will.

"Oh, Versailles! And where has she gone to at Versailles?"

"What is that to you, impudence?"

"Nothing, for you are not speaking the truth. Madame la Baronne has gone to the reception of Madame de Steulis."

"I tell you, madame has gone to Versailles, to the house of Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu; gone in a carriage with two horses and with directions to the driver not to spare them. Well, what do you say to that?"

"Only that you have told me all I want to know," replied Placide, turning on his heel. "I'm off."

"Where to?"

"A cabaret. If madame is gone to Versailles, she won't be back for a good time yet."

Rosine grumbled as she watched him depart.

"And the silver?" she cried after him. "You have not cleaned it."

"*Ma foi,*" said Placide, "clean it yourself. The exercise will do you good."

He walked off.

He left the Rue Coq Héron and passed through several streets till he reached the Rue de la Ville L'Évêque, where he entered the *Couromme*, a posting-inn possessing one of the best stables in Paris.

He had determined to follow the baroness to Versailles, and as a stage was just starting, he took his place in it.

CHAPTER IV

THE GALLANTRY OF DE RICHELIEU

THAT evening Monsieur de Richelieu was in very good humor. He had finished supper and his digestion was behaving itself; he had got rid of his half-yearly accounts with the assistance of Raffé, examined minutely his financial position and found himself with two thousand louis more in hand than he had expected; besides, politics were shaping favorably. De Choiseul, not destined to fall for another seven months, seemed on the point of falling, and the fall of De Choiseul as minister meant, every one said, the elevation of Monsieur de Richelieu.

He had supped alone, and after supper, followed by Raffé, he returned to his library.

"Ma foi!" said the maréchal, as he entered the room, "I have had over seventy years' experience of life, only to learn that he who sups alone sups best. In company we eat too much, to cover our boredom, and drink too much, to liven our wits."

Raffé laughed the little noiseless laugh peculiar to

him. Monsieur de Richelieu's philosophy always left him quite cynical.

"Well," said he, "if monsieur will pursue politics he must expect what he finds."

"And what do you think he may expect to find—grumbler?"

"Oh, *ma foi!* what else but dull dinner-parties and indigestions, not to speak of headaches, pitfalls, traps and rogues."

"It's true," said De Richelieu, taking his seat at the bureau. "Every politician is a rogue, with this difference, that whereas most rogues are amusing, all politicians are dull."

"And since monsieur is a politician—"

"I am not. It is true that yesterday, when De Choiseul seemed on the point of falling, as he will fall some day, I was prepared, for the good of France and not for any personal reason—I say I was prepared—"

"To take his portfolio."

"Yes, for the good of France."

"Ay, ay," said Raffé, with another silent little laugh. "For the good of France, the old motto of the politicians."

"Silence!" said De Richelieu. "For what other reason would I mix myself up in affairs of state?"

What ambitions have I, who possess everything?
An old man—”

“True,” said Raffé.

“Yet not too old to strike a blow—”

“For the good of France.”

“For the good of France. All the same, there are younger men. Why should I waste the last years of my life struggling against rogues, avoiding pitfalls, laboring under the weight of a portfolio heavy with the mistakes of my predecessor? No, *mordieu!* give me peace, my hawks and hounds, quietude and the friends I care for: all better than a dozen portfolios.”

“True,” said Raffé, “but it seems to me, Monsieur, that there is some one at the door.”

Some one, in fact, had knocked at the door. It was a servant, bearing in his hand a heavy gold salver, upon which lay a letter with a yellow seal. The king alone sealed his letters with yellow wax, and De Richelieu’s eyes lighted up as he stretched out his hand and took the letter.

He broke the seal and read:

“Dear Maréchal,

“Our friend De C. is very ill; so hold yourself in readiness should the worst occur. L.”

The note was addressed from Luciennes. His majesty, who had been seized with a scribbling fit, had despatched it by special messenger. It had no significance at all; the position of De Choiseul had not altered a whit since yesterday but it amused the mischief-loving king to excite hopes doomed to destruction, and certainly it would have amused him to watch the little comedy that followed.

De Richelieu, having read the note, turned to Raffé.

"De Choiseul has fallen."

"Oho!" said Raffé.

"He is not quite overturned, but a few more days will do it."

"Well, Monsieur," replied Raffé, "I do not see how that affects us who have declared for death and life, who care nothing for portfolios, who would avoid the struggle against rogues—"

"I am asked to hold myself in readiness," went on the maréchal, without regarding the other's words. "The king's mind is made up."

"Of contrarities."

"He has chosen me as De Choiseul's successor. Well, grumbler, what do you say to that? From all the men in France I am chosen."

"To follow Monsieur de Choiseul."

"No—to precede him."

"Well, Monsieur," replied Raffé, "I congratulate you on the compliment his majesty has paid you. Your knowledge of men will, doubtless, stand you in good stead when that heavy portfolio comes under your arm; and your knowledge of women, and if I may say so, the fascination you still exercise over them."

Raffé was De Richelieu's bitter tonic; unpleasant as his raillery and cynicism might be, it was at least always sincere; it helped De Richelieu to digest all the poisoned sugar of the court, the falsities and the absurdities. But there was one subject on which even Raffé, privileged as he was, dared scarcely to touch, and that was the love-affairs of his master.

When a man is nearly eighty, his amours form a target that even a blind man can hit, and Raffé, to do him justice, rarely expended his ammunition on so easy a mark.

"I have some knowledge of women," said De Richelieu stiffly, "and what is better than that, though I have some influence over them they have none over me. It is a power, that—though, *cordieu!* one pays for it by growing old. Had De Choiseul made a study of women as I have done, he would not now be on the eve of destruction."

"Listen, Monsieur," said Raffé, raising his hand. "Is not that a carriage?"

Faint and far-away came the sound of carriage wheels on gravel. It ceased. A carriage rapidly driven had turned into the avenue way and drawn up before the door.

Coming as it did on the message of the king, this arrival of some one unknown seemed ominous. De Richelieu, sitting sidewise in his chair, listened intently. Notwithstanding his age, his campaigns, his affectation of weariness with the world, the old *maréchal* was filled with the burning ambitions that most men leave behind them at forty. To be chief minister of state, to match in stature the great Cardinal Richelieu, to complete in diplomacy the wonderful career that had commenced in war, this was the chief ambition of the Duc de Richelieu at the present moment.

A knock came to the door and the same servant who had brought the letter from the king entered.

"Monsieur," said the lackey, "a lady to see you."

"A lady at this hour? What is her name?"

"Madame la Baronne Linden, Monsieur."

"*Mordieu!*" said the *maréchal*. "'Tis late for a visit of this sort. Show her in."

Raffé began to move toward the door.

"You are going?"

"Yes, Monsieur, but I leave a piece of advice behind me. This is a woman to beware of." Even as he spoke the door reopened, and Madame Linden was shown in. As she entered Raffé made his escape.

De Richelieu, who had risen, bowed to the baroness.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Madame."

"Not to me, Monsieur," replied the baroness, taking the chair indicated by him, "since I have come from Paris with the express purpose of seeing you."

"I feel honored," replied the courtly old maréchal; "deeply honored, charmed. And to what motive may I attribute so long a journey at such an hour?—for Paris is five leagues from my gates, Madame."

The baroness laughed in almost an hysterical manner.

"Five! Why, Monsieur, it seemed to me fifty, alone, shut up in the darkness of my carriage, with no companion other than my own thoughts and the fear of bandits."

"Yes, yes; but the motive, dear lady, that forced you to confront these fears?"

"The motive, Monsieur, was to make a confession and to ask a favor."

"And the confession? I will take that first," laughed Monsieur le Maréchal, sitting down in an easy-chair close to her and producing his snuff-box.

"Monsieur, I am in love."

De Richelieu opened the lid of his snuff-box, laughing slightly as if a little joke had escaped from it.

"Then, Madame," said he, "there is at least one man living who can say with truth, 'I am the happiest man in France!'"

"Alas, Monsieur, no; far from being the happiest, he is the most miserable."

She watched his hands playing with the snuff-box; hands still beautiful despite wars and years, and white, almost, as the ruffles of Mechlin lace that half hid them.

"The most miserable!"

"Alas, yes, Monsieur."

"And his name, this extraordinary person?"

"The Comte Armand de Lussac, Monsieur, your kinsman."

She had no hope at all of immediate help from De Richelieu, yet, as she spoke the words, anxiety almost to suffocation seized her, for she knew that

by the manner of the *maréchal* when he heard De Lussac's name she would know whether he had opened the drawer and discovered that it had been tampered with.

De Richelieu, however, showed no sign at all of anger at the name, and she knew by his manner that all was still right. She could have laughed aloud, so great was her relief. Hope, the water of the strong and the wine of the weak, sent the blood coursing more rapidly through her veins, heightening the color of her cheek and the brightness of her eyes and lending the last touch of perfection to her beauty.

"Well, Madame," said the old warrior, warming to her charms, "what will you have? You love a philosopher, that is to say, a creature who is miserable when other men are happy, and happy when other men are miserable; who lives in a tub like Monsieur Diogenes when other men live in houses."

"Monsieur," replied she, "Monsieur de Lussac to-day, at the order of Monsieur de Sartines, has been seized and imprisoned in the fortress of the Bastille."

De Richelieu started and almost dropped the snuff-box with which he was still toying.

"Armand imprisoned in the Bastille! Why, he is

still my guest! We had *déjeuner* together to-day; it is true, he went to Paris this afternoon, but I expected him to return to-night."

"Monsieur, what I have said is true, for I had it from the lips of Monsieur de Sartines himself."

The maréchal took another pinch of snuff. The news did not altogether displease him nor did it altogether astonish him. The king had given him very direct hints as to the political health of his kinsman; there was no disgrace in imprisonment under a *lettre de cachet*, and he felt that a course of severe treatment was just the medicine required to bring his cousin from philosophy to reason. Profoundly selfish, he had no pity at all for the personal feelings of the captive on the matter.

"Well, Madame," said he, "now that I have heard your confession, I can guess your request. You wish me to intercede for this unfortunate philosopher. Well, you may rest assured that I will place the whole matter before the king. It will take a few days, no doubt. I do not know De Sartines' reason for this act. Armand, I believe, has been mixing himself up with those confounded philosophers, but he is a gentleman, and I am sure has done nothing of a nature that will preclude me from pressing his claims before the king."

The baroness tried to imagine the maréchal's face had he known that here, but a few hours ago, De Lussac had tried to rob him of a document involving the honor of the king. She knew that all hope of help from De Richelieu was vain: days must elapse in the most favorable circumstances before the young man could be freed, and during those days the maréchal would most certainly discover that some one had been to his drawer, found the secret panel, and attempted to abstract the document. His keen mind would at once know who the culprit was, and De Lussac's fate would be imprisonment for life.

De Richelieu, for his own sake, would be compelled to act in the matter in such a way that there would be no chance of the scandal against the king ever escaping.

The baroness had used her appeal for De Lussac only as the opening gambit in the desperate and dangerous game for his life which was now beginning.

"Thank you, Monsieur," said she. "I knew that in appealing to you I should not be wrong." Then, seeming to dismiss De Lussac from her mind, "But, Monsieur, I had another motive for my journey to-night—" She paused.

"Yes, Madame?"

"Monsieur, I will be frank with you. That motive was—myself."

"A most charming motive, but one which I can not, yet, fully understand—"

"I had more truly said self—and more truly, selfish. Surely, Monsieur, that is a motive that any politician can understand? You see I am frank."

"I hear you say so, Madame, and you alarm me."

"In what way?"

"Why, Madame," laughed De Richelieu, "you are the first woman I have ever heard admitting the fact of her selfishness. It does not seem natural."

"And it seems to me," replied the baroness with a little grimace, "that I am the first human being to whom Monsieur le Maréchal Duc de Richelieu has admitted the fact that he is capable of being frightened." She rose to her feet. "Monsieur, I will go, for at this rate we shall soon have no secrets to hide from one another. You are dangerous to me, I am dangerous to you." She moved toward the door.

"Stay, Madame," cried De Richelieu, perplexed and fascinated, feeling that there was something more personal to him in the visit of the charming creature than an attempt to enlist him in the cause of De Lussac. "One moment."

He had risen with her.

"For what?" asked she, pausing.

"For what? *Petite mystérieuse!* For what did you come these five leagues? Why did you face the darkness, the fear of bandits?"

"*Ma foi,*" replied she, her hand upon the door-handle. "It seems to me I came to confess that I was selfish, to make you confess that you were capable of fear, and all in the first few minutes of our interview. Heavens! Monsieur, as I said a few moments ago, if our interview were to last an hour, at this rate, we should have nothing to hide one from the other."

"You perplex me" said the maréchal, now completely fascinated but not knowing how to take her.

She laughed. "There you are again, Monsieur! More admissions of weakness. Monsieur de Richelieu, who reads women as other men read books. Monsieur de Richelieu, the most astute man in France, perplexed by an adventuress!"

"Adventuress!"

"There, again!" cried the baroness, opening the door as if to escape. "Another confession! O Monsieur, let me go, for if we remain longer together this interview will be destructive to both our self-respects."

De Richelien took her firmly by the hand, closed the door and led her back to her chair.

"Extraordinary and charming woman," said the old warrior as she let herself be led like a child. "You are not now talking to Monsieur de Richelieu, but to the *maréchal* of France, who is at your commands, and who commands you."

"I obey the conqueror of Mahon."

"Then, Madame, as a good soldier, I command you to speak. Why did you come to me to-night?"

"Monsieur, I have forgotten."

"Forgotten!"

"I ought to say, I do not choose to remember. I would rather forget. Monsieur, I have changed my mind. When I came to you to-night I came on account of poor Monsieur de Lussac, but I admit I had the thought of asking for a favor for myself at the all but royal hands of Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu. Well, Monsieur, when it comes to the point, my courage is not there to meet me. And I say to myself, 'Why should I ask a favor of one who scarcely knows me?' Monsieur, spare my feelings."

"Madame, spare mine. I burn to be of service to you. Speak."

"Well, then, Monsieur," said she, as though suddenly making up her mind, "I would ask your help."

"Against whom?"

"Monsieur, I am beset by cats."

"Cats?"

"Madame d'Harlancourt hates me."

"Aha!"

"Madame de Stenlis insulted me to-day."

"Yes?"

"Monsieur de Joycuse flung his mud at me."

"But he is not a cat."

"No, Monsieur, he is a cur."

De Richelieu laughed. "Well, Madame, and how can I help you against these people?"

"Oh, Monsieur, you have only to raise your voice and all these creatures will fly. But wait! I said to myself, who is there in all France that I can ask for a word of friendliness? All the men of the court are men of the world who would not understand me. There is only one, the Duc de Richelieu, a great soldier, a courtier, and a man whose age places him above the futilities of the world."

De Richelieu made a little grimace.

"I came here to-night and I found myself face to face with a man who, whatever his age may be, is not an old man, and—you see I am quite frank with you—I feared—"

"O Madame, why should you fear?"

"Alas! Monsieur—an unprotected woman—"

De Richelieu drew his chair close to hers and took her hand.

"Madame," said he, "you have sought my protection. Why, then, should you fear your protector?"

"Why—I fear myself too. Now, you see, I am making more confessions. Believe me, it were better I should go. The women of the court who attack me are better, perhaps, than the men who would defend me. I shall leave France. Monsieur, release my hand."

"A moment."

"Ah, yes, a moment—that is what men always say when they can think of nothing better. Monsieur, the moment has passed."

De Richelieu, instead of releasing her hand, slipped down on one knee beside her; the fire in the old maréchal's blood had broken into flame. Taking the captured hand in his left hand, his right arm slipped round her waist.

"Monsieur," said she, drawing slightly away, "that is encroachment."

"No, Madame, it is the smallest waist in the world."

"Monsieur, if I were a designing woman I might,

now, turn you round my finger. Oh, how weak are men!"

"Yes, Madame, men are weak, always, before loveliness."

"Then, Monsieur, be strong."

"I am; at the moment, perhaps, I am the strongest man in France."

"Then have pity on the weakest woman."

"I am all pity for weakness; though I hold you like this, it is only to symbolize that protection which is at your service. You say you have women enemies who are pressing you hard—"

"No, Monsieur, it is you who are pressing me hard, and when hard pressed, a woman cries out. Monsieur, I am about to cry out."

"A truce, then," cried De Richelieu, releasing her and rising to his feet. The baroness also rose up.

"The conqueror of Mahon calling for a truce! Monsieur, you are defeated!"

"I acknowledge it."

"I have wound you round my finger."

"Then, *chérie*, wind me round again," cried Richelieu, laughing, half piqued, fire in his eye, and advancing victoriously upon her.

This was the real attack, and Madame Linden, with a little scream, such as women give when they

see a mouse, outstretched her hands and held him off. Struggling with him, half laughing, panting, she suddenly drew back.

"Monsieur," said she in a low voice, "a moment—there is some one at the door."

De Richelieu, flushed and almost triumphant, turned to the door with a terrible oath. He opened it. There was no one.

"Ah, Monsieur, but there was," said she, still in that muted voice that led the hopes of the old man heavenward. "I heard some one. Go into the corridor and see that we are alone."

He went into the corridor and instantly she closed the door and locked it on him. She flashed across the room to the bureau. The blood surging to her face, ringing in her ears, she seized the handle of the top right-hand drawer; it yielded. The drawer was still open; she pulled it out; on the top of a number of papers lay a folded document.

"Madame, Madame!" came De Richelieu's voice from the other side of the door, as he tapped lightly with his knuckles. "Open! Think if any of the servants were to come!"

"Monsieur," cried she in an even voice, as she unfolded and glanced at the document. "Before I let you in I must dictate terms."

"Anything," replied the voice of the duc. "Only open."

She saw De Sartines' signature, folded the document and gently closed the drawer. All the time she was speaking to him in that wonderful level voice that told nothing of her emotions or her triumph.

"Well, Monsieur, my terms are simple. You must promise me solemnly not to molest me."

"Yes, yes, I promise."

"Not to touch me." As she advanced toward the door she was putting the document in her pocket.

"I promise."

"On your word?"

"On my word."

"Well, then, Monsieur, I will open."

She opened the door.

"*Mordieu*," cried De Richelieu, half laughing and more than ever fascinated. "What a position for me had one of the servants come!"

"And what a position for me, Monsieur!"

She was now flushed, laughing, excited; as though her success had electrified her mind, of a sudden a new plan full-born and alluring rose before her. She had triumphed on behalf of De Lusac; she had in her hand a terrible weapon. Another woman would have contented herself with that

evening's work; not so Madame Linden. To strike all her enemies with one blow, to ruin De Sartines and to humble the D'Harlancourt, Madame de Stenlis and De Joyeuse at the same time, that was her scheme; and she determined that De Richelieu should help her in it.

"At least, Madame, you were on the right side of the door," replied the maréchal, "and *ma foi*, but one might fancy that loveliness had locked herself in with you and you had changed clothes. Would that I had put my eye to the keyhole!"

"How do you mean, Monsieur?"

"Because, Madame, before you closed the door on me your beauty burned my eyes; now it blinds them."

"Monsieur," said she, glancing at the clock, "it is late, and I have trespassed greatly on your time. You have paid me a hundred compliments, you have held my hand, encircled my waist, allowed yourself nearly all the liberties which a man of pleasure takes with a woman of his sort. You have treated me, in short, as you have been accustomed to treat the ladies of the court. I am not a woman of that sort. I do not love you, Monsieur, I love Monsieur de Lussac; but always before marriage I hold that a

woman is free to give or to sell her favors, and that it is a matter entirely between herself, her conscience and her maker.

"I wish to revenge myself upon my enemies, and if you will help me, I will say to you, 'Monsieur de Richelieu, when my revenge is complete, come to me and I will pay you for your assistance with—'"

"With what, Madame?"

"My lips."

"And what is this assistance that you require, Madame?"

"Oh, do not be alarmed; it is very simple. I wish you to invite me to *déjeuner* at your house in Paris to-morrow at noon."

"A thousand times, yes."

"But, wait. I wish you to invite some guests to meet me."

De Richelieu made a grimace.

"And the guests—?"

"Are, first of all, Monsieur le Comte de Sartes."

De Richelieu laughed.

"Certainly, Madame. Who else?"

"Madame de Stenlis, Madame d'Harlancourt, and Monsieur de Joyeuse."

De Richelieu pursed his lips.

"What you ask is easy enough, Madame. What else?"

"Nothing more."

"But, Madame, I do not see your point. I invite you to *déjeuner* with these people; you all come. How does that help you to triumph over them? They will all be banded against you. You do not know these women of the court and what they are capable of."

"I do, indeed, Monsieur; but they don't know me. Please do as I ask and leave me only my wit, and I will bring them all literally to their knees."

De Richelieu rubbed his hands, then laughed. "*Mordieu*," thought he, "this ought to be as good as the *Comédie Française*." Then to the baroness: "Madame, I will do as you say. But the invitations must be despatched early to-morrow morning."

"Write them, Monsieur," said she, "when I am gone, and your servant can deliver them to-morrow early. Make the invitation urgent, so that it may override any preëngagement these people may have."

"Leave that to me, Madame. I shall make it little short of a command."

"Ah," said she, "you are a man of spirit and

sense, and I promise you, Monsieur, one thing: you shall have great amusement at your house in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré to-morrow at half past twelve."

"And after?" asked De Richelieu.

She laughed.

"I always pay my debts. And this is for earnest." She held out her lips and he kissed her.

Her extraordinary frankness, her golden voice, her beauty and personal magnetism had completely bound this old libertine in their pentagram; the thought that he was getting the better of De Lussac, a man so much his junior, did not lessen his satisfaction.

"And now, Monsieur, I must go. To-morrow at half past twelve, expect me."

He followed her as she passed into the corridor and then across the great hall, where they parted. On the steps before which her carriage was drawn up, who should be waiting for her but Placide!

"What!" cried she. "You here!"

"Yes, Madame. Rosine told me that you had come here, and I took a cabriolet and followed you, as I have some very important information for your ear."

"And your information?"

"Madame, what I have to say has to do with Monsieur de Lussac."

"Then get into the carriage with me and you can tell me as we drive."

She made him get in and take the front seat. Then the carriage started.

All the way from Paris Placide had been racking his head for an excuse for having followed her.

"Well," said she, when they had cleared the avenue gates, "your information?"

"Just this, Madame," said the old fellow bluffly. "I am not blind."

"So you posted all the way from Paris to tell me about the state of your eyes! Well, then, Monsieur Placide, you shall pay your own expenses for the journey, and you can, now that you have relieved yourself of your information, get out and sit beside the coachman."

Placide noted her gaiety and animation; more than ever he felt certain that whatever business had brought her to De Richelieu's, it was of a most important nature and that she had been successful in it. He had come with the idea of trying to pick up news from the majordomo, but at the last moment he determined to adhere to the baroness.

"Madame," he went on, quite unmoved, "I am not blind, and it has been easy for me to see that you are not disinterested in anything concerning the welfare of Monsieur de Lussac."

"Ah, Monsieur de Lussac!"

"Yes, Madame. He has been imprisoned. I heard the news this evening from the footman of Monsieur de Duras."

"And you came after me to Versailles to inform me of this!" The little lamp that lighted the interior of the carriage showed him that her eyes were moist. His fidelity had evidently moved her to the heart; he had not reckoned on this.

"Oh, Madame, that was nothing. Just a summer evening's drive."

"My good Placide," she replied, "fidelity is a great deal in this world, where all men are unfaithful. But you have been a grumbling servant, you have set Rosine by the ears, and I doubt, even, if you have been satisfied with your mistress. In short, my good Placide, you are an intolerable servant, and as a recompense for your fidelity this evening I now discharge you from my service."

"What now?" thought Placide, at this unexpected turn.

"I discharge you as a servant and reëngage you as a friend, a salaried friend. Well, what do you say to that, grumbler?"

Placide said nothing for a moment. One might have fancied that she had touched the old scamp's heart.

"*Cordieu!* Madame," grumbled he, at last, "you are making a lot out of nothing. I am just your servant."

"And my friend."

All the way to Paris, behind madame's triumphant gaiety was the fear of pursuit. If Richelieu opened that fatal drawer before she had put sufficient distance between them to make pursuit impossible, he would pursue her. It was, therefore, with a sigh of relief that she passed the toll-gate and the gates of Paris, and heard the familiar grinding of the wheels on the pavement of the city.

It was long after midnight, and the deserted streets lay under the moon. The hungry city slept, guarded by the Bastille standing like a mailed giant in the moonlight.

At the house in the Rue Coq Héron the carriage stopped. Placide descended and helped his mistress to alight. As he did so, his hand, brushing her dress, felt something in her pocket; the folded

parchment of the document could be distinctly felt through the brocade. His hound's instinct told him that here lay the secret of the journey to De Richelieu.

He followed her into the house, where she bade him good night and went to her room.

Having locked her door, she took the precious document from her pocket and read it carefully from the first word to the last. Yes, this was the infamous contract, in very truth, a weapon against De Sartines more formidable than a dagger. She went to the little bureau in the corner of the room and, taking a sheet of paper and a pen, sat down and began to make a fair copy of the document, word for word. When this was accomplished, she locked the two papers away and went to bed.

She awoke an hour after dawn, dressed without calling Rosine, and taking from the bureau the original document, folded it in a sheet of paper, making a little parcel of it which she sealed. Then, placing the parcel in her pocket, she left the house.

She had put on her plainest dress and a veil which almost hid her features, so that she might pass unnoticed through the early morning streets. Her plan of campaign was now quite clearly mapped out before her, and though she had no friend in

Paris in whom she could implicitly place her trust, her genius had discovered a man the soul of honor, a man whom she could trust, and, moreover, a man who walked fearless of the king and De Sartines.

She had left now the broader streets and, inquiring her way as she went, found at last the Rue Platrière, a street rather gone to decay. Some of the houses in the street were of great antiquity, gabled and weathercocked, sunken in their foundations by age; remnants of that Paris which once showed its fantasy of roofs, vanes, spires and towers to the sun; the Paris of Louis XI., half university, half city; the Paris of Villon and Rabelais, through which in the winter wolves prowled; dominated by Notre Dame and the gibbets of Mont-faucon.

At one of these old houses Madame Linden paused, verified the number, and then, going up the two steps that led to the doorway, rang the queasy bell.

Scarcely had she released the handle when the door opened and a man appeared. He was gray-bearded, shabby and rusty, attired in a snuff-colored coat the worse for wear and a broad-brimmed hat; he carried a book under his arm, and it was quite evident that he had not opened the door in reply to

the summons, for, when he saw the veiled figure of the woman, he started back.

"What do you want?" said he, holding the door in such a way that he could clap it to at a moment's notice.

"Monsieur," replied the baroness, who, despite the desperate seriousness of her mission, could scarcely restrain her mirth at the appearance of the book-worm and his evident alarm, "I want an interview with you on a matter of the utmost importance to one of your friends."

"You know me then?"

"Oh, Monsieur, all Europe knows you, and though I have never seen you before, yet I recognize you at once."

The book-worm, allured by the voice of the charmer, came forward and, closing the door behind him, stood on the step.

He had a mirthless face, a face wherein lurked suspicion and distrust; an extraordinary face, so much of greatness and of littleness did it contain; the face of a practical man and a dreamer—he had even forgotten to wash it that morning, just as he had forgotten to brush his coat, which he held tightly clasped about him with one thin hand, as if to fend off the approaches of the world.

Thus in the early morning brightness stood Monsieur Rousseau of Geneva, a most difficult subject to deal with, as Madame Linden perceived, despite her veil. Soft words were of no use as a first approach to this evasive and self-centered nature.

"Well, Monsieur," she went on, "I can compliment you on many things, but there is one thing on which I can not felicitate you, and that is your sense of hospitality."

"Madame," said Rousseau, taken aback, "I am bound on an early morning visit to my friend Monsieur de Rennes. Besides, Madame, I do not know you."

"Therefore you clap your door in my face? Ah, Monsieur, how easy it is to be a philosopher; to order an emperor out of your sunlight, to clap your door in the face of a woman! Come, I will explain myself, then, in the open air, if you will allow me to walk beside you down the street. And now, directly to my point, your friend Monsieur le Comte de Lussac is in prison."

"In prison?"

"In the fortress of the Bastile, caught in the toils of Monsieur de Sartines, who will devour him as surely as a spider devours a fly, if I do not come to his assistance."

Now Rousseau had a real fondness for his disciple, De Lussac, but Rousseau, though he preached unrest, was no conspirator; he knew nothing of the Society of the Midi; he was a philosopher, a musician, a thinker; his social contract did not include fisticuffs.

"Madame," said he, stopping and facing her, "what you tell me disturbs me deeply. In prison! And what has this unfortunate young man done?"

"This unfortunate young man, Monsieur, has simply been carrying out in practice what you preach in theory. You have made him discontented with the world as it is, and he has been trying to upset it, succeeding only in nearly upsetting Monsieur de Sartines' coach."

"Upsetting Monsieur de Sartines' coach?"

"I speak figuratively, Monsieur. He has been conspiring against the social order, and the social order has placed him in prison."

Rousseau fumbled with his book, standing before Madame Linden like a school-boy. In the few moments of their conversation her intelligence had overridden his genius. She was taking him to task.

"Madame," said he at last, "I have nothing to do with conspiracies. I have never preached sedition. You say that my teaching has made the young man

discontented with things as they are. Granted: that is what my teaching aims at. Since when was contentment a virtue? Take it even in art. What artist who is content with his work ever arrives at greatness?"

In another moment he would have plunged and hidden himself in the fountain of philosophy, but madame was too quick for him.

"Monsieur, you wander from the point. This is not a question of art but politics, and Monsieur de Lussac has arrived, owing to the discontentment you taught him, not at greatness, but in prison. It is your duty to help me, without in the least involving yourself, to extricate him."

"Madame," said Rousseau decisively, "if this is as you say, I will myself go and see the king."

"And the king will say: 'Certainly, Monsieur Rousseau; we will see, we will see.' And he will refer you to Monsieur de la Vrillière, who will say, 'Certainly, Monsieur Rousseau, everything shall be done to clear this unfortunate gentleman.' And Monsieur de la Vrillière will refer you to Monsieur de Sartines, who will talk about Justice, whom, by the by, he does not know in the least. Oh, Monsieur Rousseau, you are the greatest philosopher of your

age, but among these men of the world your philosophy would lead you nowhere; the production of immortal books is your *métier* in life, not the conduct of quarrels with policemen. Leave all that to me. I shall free Monsieur de Lussac if you will only do one thing for me."

"And that?"

She took the packet from her pocket.

"Take this, and treasure it as you would your life. I shall probably send a servant for it this evening. He will show you this ring—" she exposed a cameo ring on her hand. "Give it to him. If you do not hear from me by noon to-morrow, you will know that I am either dead or in prison, for the people I am attacking are merciless people and do not care what weapons they use. In that event, take the packet yourself to Monsieur de Maupeou, the vice-chancellor. In that case I shall be well avenged."

"But, Madame, what is this parcel?" asked the philosopher, not in the least delighted at the prospect of being made the minister of her vengeance.

"Monsieur, it contains the social death-warrant of an unjust man, a man who is preying upon the people; it is also at the same time the order of release for Monsieur de Lussac. With that parcel in

your hand, Monsieur, you can command events; you can, at least, release De Lussac, the man whom your philosophy has sent to prison."

"And the name of the unjust man?" asked Rousseau.

"Monsieur de Sartines."

"The lieutenant-general of police?"

"Precisely."

Rousseau nearly let the parcel drop. Here was a nice imbroglio. Ten minutes ago he had put on his hat to leave his house, content with himself and at peace with all the world, except Thérèse; he had opened the door, humming a tune from one of his operas, and in a trice fate had seized him in the form of this veiled woman, thrust a weapon in his hand, and ordered him to attack De Sartines, that tiger De Sartines, of whom, despite all his philosophy, he was very much afraid.

Unfortunate Rousseau! He was always a martyr to women; even that morning, before starting, he had suffered from a bad attack of Thérèse, escaping from her only to fall into the hands of Madame Linden.

"But, Madame, it is against my principles to use force in this fashion. I am but a student; my part in the world is entirely passive; the hand which is

powerful armed with the pen is always at a loss armed with the sword—”

Again he would have dived into the vague waters of verbiage, and hidden himself, had she not caught him, so to speak, by the coat tails.

“Monsieur, you may be a student, but you are a man; and a man who loves and honors you has been imprisoned for no fault but that he followed your teaching, though wrong-headedly enough, perhaps. You have nothing to fear. It is I who will bear the brunt of the battle. I ask you only to hold the document in your house and in the event of my not communicating with you by noon to-morrow to hand it to Monsieur de Maupeou. He is a bitter enemy of this villain, De Sartines. Monsieur, believe me when I say there is no danger to you in the transaction. I am moving in it for no object but love. Monsieur de Lussac is my lover ”

She lifted her veil.

Rousseau, before that loveliness, succumbed. He took off his hat and bowed to her, at the same time thrusting his book and the parcel into the capacious pocket of his coat.

He was always a sentimentalist. Though at times a philosopher, a musician, a botanist, a writer, the sentimentalist was always there, and the sentiment-

alist told him that the woman was speaking the truth and was entirely to be trusted. He hated meddling at all in the matter, but it seemed to him his path of duty was clear. He must do everything in his power to assist in the enlargement of De Lusac.

"Madame," said he, "I will act as you desire. Personal considerations do not weigh with me in a matter where the right is concerned." Then, having discharged this fine sentiment, he turned crusty. "Though I have nothing but your word on the matter, still I am constrained to believe it. I must now return and place this packet in safe-keeping. Good day, Madame."

He turned and began to walk back toward the house. She watched him for a moment, then with a little laugh she ran after him. This dreamer had never even asked her name; suspicious as he was, always fearing spies and imaginary enemies, he had neglected this, the first question that a business man would have put to her.

"Well, Madame?"

"My name is—pardon me for giving it in full—the Baroness Sophie Anastase Thérèse Linden, and my address is Number 12, Rue Coq Héron."

"Madame," replied he grimly, "whether a bar-

ness or a woman of the people matters not to me at all." He put his fingers to the brim of his old hat and shuffled on.

The baroness looked after him as he went, a shabby old man in a snuff-colored coat ; testy, suspicious, casting his eyes about him, clasping his coat lapel with a veined and nervous hand, the strangest figure of an immortal.

Then, satisfied that she had placed her weapon of destruction in very safe-keeping, she returned to the Rue Coq Héron.

CHAPTER V

DE SARTINES BECOMES HOST

THE Paris residence of Monsieur le Maréchal Duc de Richelieu was situated in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, on the right as you went toward the royal palace and almost opposite to the Rue D'Aguesseau.

Along this side of the way one found the front-ages of a number of palatial mansions stretching from the Hôtel de Montbazon to the Hôtel d'Evreux. The broad gardens of these houses, bird-haunted, sparkling with the waters of fountains and glorious with flowers, reached right down to the tree-planted spaces bordering the Avenue des Tuileries. The Hôtel de Richelieu, which shortly after the date of this story the maréchal exchanged for another residence in Paris, was not the least sumptuous of these houses, and this morning at half past eleven, as its owner stood for a moment on the terrace overlooking the gardens, flowers never ap-

peared more beautiful, fountains brighter, or trees more green than those fountains, flowers, and trees stretching before him to the foliage of the Avenue des Tuileries. He had just arrived from Versailles, and he was thinking nothing of the beauty before him; the impending *déjeuner* occupied his thoughts. It amused him to think of Madame Linden in the arena with four virulent enemies attacking her, sharp-toothed as rats and poisonous as serpents; he expected to see them horribly mangled, and he expected to see her horribly bitten. It would be a duel of wit conducted with smiles, to the tune of the clinking of champagne glasses and the sound of violins. He had sent the invitations by special messenger on that morning, and so urgently worded that he was sure of all the belligerents responding.

As he was thinking of this, a servant came to the terrace from the house, with the announcement that Monsieur de Sartines had arrived.

De Richelieu entered the house and passing down a corridor, found the reception-room which opened on the room where *déjeuner* would be served. Here, superb in the costume of the day, sword at side, in a brocaded coat and with ruffles of Mechlin lace, stood the lieutenant-general of police.

The two noblemen bowed one to the other with

great formality, then dropping formality like a cloak, De Sartines cast himself into a chair and crossed his legs.

"Well, my dear Duc, you see I have come. I guessed the motive of your urgency—that unfortunate De Lussac—"

"Yes!" cried De Richelieu, who had almost forgotten his kinsman's predicament. "What of him? I heard you had placed him in retirement. What has he been doing?"

De Sartines pulled a long face.

"Oh, *ma foi!* what has he not? It is the most serious case I have yet had to deal with." Then, leaning forward in his chair, he told the story of De Lussac as we know it, with this addition, that on searching in the orange-tree tub in the courtyard of De Lussac's house, a packet of papers belonging to the Society of the Midi had been unearthed, incriminating many people, and especially De Lussac.

"*Ma foi!*" cried De Richelieu, "this is serious! Fool! This will mean banishment."

"Oh, no, Monsieur," replied De Sartines; "this will mean the Isle St. Margu rite. We can not let this firebrand free across the frontier to work his sedition perhaps at Geneva or in Holland. But you

need not fear; there will be no family disgrace, just removal, extinction."

Scarcely had De Sartines finished than a servant entered and approached De Richelieu.

"Monsieur Raffé to see you, Monsieur."

"Raffé to see me! Why, he must have come all the way from Versailles. One moment, my dear De Sartines."

He left the room and in the library found Raffé. Raffé was white as death.

"Monsieur," cried he, when his master had closed the door, "a terrible thing has happened."

"Yes! Speak! What is it?"

"Your bureau has been tampered with."

"My bureau!"

"Monsieur, when you left me your keys this morning, with instructions to go over the Tarnier affair, I went to your bureau. The top right-hand drawer, when I tried to unlock it, proved to be unlocked. The papers seemed to be in order, but I remembered the secret panel inclosing the document you know of concerning Monsieur de Sartines. My God! Monsieur," cried Raffé, suddenly collapsing into a chair, "the document is gone."

"Gone!" cried De Richelieu.

"Gone; ay, gone; and I know who has taken it."

De Richelieu, greatly shaken by this news, said nothing for a moment. He remembered last night, and the baroness, and how she had locked him out of the room.

"Well," he said at last. "Speak. Who has taken it?"

"Monsieur de Lussac."

"De Lussac!"

"Yes, Monsieur; he came on that visit for no reason. He was alone in the library. Oh, it was he, beyond any manner of doubt. No one else had access to the place."

De Richelieu, calmer now, reflected on this. He felt sure in his heart that the woman of the night before was the culprit, but his *amour propre* revolted at the thought. He preferred to think that he had been betrayed by his kinsman rather than that he had been fooled by a woman. Then he remembered their connection, and the truth, that perhaps the pair of them had united to outwit him, began to dawn on his mind. An intense anger amounting to hatred of this pair of lovers arose in his heart. But the conqueror of Mahon was not a man to be conquered by his temper.

"Return to Versailles," said he to Raffé, "and

await my instructions. Place the whole household under surveillance. You are absolutely certain that you have made no mistake?"

"Absolutely, Monsieur."

"Then go."

The duc returned to the reception-room where he had left De Sartines. He was undecided yet as to what course he should take; he knew that the situation as regarded De Sartines was serious, but when the document began to speak in strange hands it would be time enough for De Richelieu to discover that he had been robbed of it. He was not a man to make confessions and explanations.

"Well," said De Sartines, "and what had Monsieur Raffé to say?"

"Oh, nothing—his usual matters—and that reminds me, the urgent business invitation to *déjeuner* had nothing to do with De Lussac."

"With what, then?"

"Why, with a most charming woman who insists upon meeting you."

"Aha! And who is she, this charming woman?"

"I will give you a hundred guesses and you will be wrong every time."

"Then put me out of my suspense."

"Madame la Baronne Sophie Linden."

De Sartines stared for a moment; then he broke into a fit of laughter.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* you have invited me to meet her! This will kill me!"

"In what way?"

"Why, my dear Duc, I have decided to arrest her. I would have arrested her yesterday, only I had not a powerful enough case against her. This finding of the papers of the Society of the Midi has changed all that. True, her name is not mentioned in them, but she is a friend and the mistress of De Lussac, and he wrote to her concerning them. I shall hold her in prison for a week, and then bundle her back to Vienna with a note to Monsieur Talliène of the Vienna police."

"*Cordieu!*" said the duc, "and I invited her to *déjeuner!*"

"Well, my dear De Richelieu, you are well out of the results of that invitation. She is a most dangerous woman. Yesterday she tried to extract a hundred thousand francs from me. She threatened me, yes."

The Duc de Richelieu was silent for a moment. Then he turned to De Sartines.

"She must come here, all the same."

"What!"

"I wish her impertinence punished. She imposed herself on me; she proposed the *déjeuner* as a means of meeting you and some other people who are coming and whom she hates; she hoped to get you all under her tongue, and she used me as her instrument. Grand idea! You have not issued the order of arrest yet?"

"No."

"Well, then, I present you with this hôtel for the day. You are the host, and when Madame Linden arrives, deal with her as you please."

"*Ma foi!*" said De Sartines grimly, "that is not so bad." He pondered the idea for a moment. "You are in earnest?"

"Absolutely," replied the duc, who, debarred from offering insult to the woman whom he now hated in his own house, felt perfectly certain that De Sartines would not hesitate to do so in a borrowed one.

"Very well, then," replied De Sartines. "I shall deal with this lady. Call me a servant."

De Richelieu did so, and De Sartines gave his orders.

"Go at once," said he, "to the Hôtel de Sartines, and ask Monsieur Beauregard to come here."

"You will arrest her here?" asked the duc.

"Ma foi, why not?"

The sound of a carriage entering the courtyard came faintly from outside. Next moment a knock came to the door, and Monsieur de Joyeuse was announced. He had been surprised at the invitation, for he was not on very friendly terms with the maréchal. His surprise had brought him.

He bowed to the duc.

"Pay your compliments to Monsieur de Sartines first," said De Richelieu, "for he is your host, though the invitation came in my name."

De Joyeuse, with an impertinence that was absolutely his own, turned his back on the maréchal and bowed to De Sartines.

"I put my stomach in the hands of your cook, my dear De Sartines, or what is left of it since I died from the cook of Monsieur de Richelieu."

"Then, Monsieur," said De Richelieu, "it is evident that you have arisen too early this morning. It is not the hour yet for the resurrection."

"Why, here is Monsieur de Richelieu," cried the young man, turning to the maréchal with an air of surprise. "Another guest of Monsieur de Sartines! The resurrection, ha! You are well qualified to speak on that subject, Monsieur."

"Perhaps, but not so ready to act in the matter as Monsieur de Joyeuse."

"And how?"

"Oh, *ma foi*," said the old warrior, taking a pinch of snuff, "it is said all over Paris that should the angel Gabriel be late, it will not matter to Monsieur de Joyeuse, for he can always blow his own trumpet."

"That is true," replied De Joyeuse, "but at least it is not an ear-trumpet. And whom, Monsieur," turning to De Sartines, "are we expecting as guests to-day?"

"Oh, several people. Madame la Comtesse d'Harlancourt is coming."

"Madame d'Harlancourt!" said De Joyeuse in a reflective tone. "Let me see. Do they not say she poisoned her first husband?"

"No, Monsieur," cut in the duc. "She only lived with him."

"Ah," said De Sartines, "if you only knew—" He stopped short.

"Well, Monsieur?"

"Nothing."

De Richelieu laughed. "*Mordieu!*" said he, "it makes me shiver sometimes when I remember that

you are the minister of police, and that your knowledge of all men's private lives is so profound."

"And all women's," said De Joyeuse, who did not seem happy on the subject of men's private lives in relation to the police. "Well, Monsieur de Sartines, and what about Madame d'Harlancourt?"

Before De Sartines could reply, the door was flung open and the stentorian voice of the majordomo announced, "Madame la Comtesse d'Harlancourt."

She was a beautiful blonde, just beginning to fade; in another five years she would be distasteful to all men; in another ten, a parchment-covered skeleton. An example of the woman who lives a fast life and grows thin, if anything more horrible than the woman who leads a fast life and grows fat.

"I am not late, am I?" cried the comtesse. "Where is my charming maréchal? Ah, Monsieur, I thought you were invisible, but you were only screened, I see, by the impertinence of Monsieur de Joyeuse and the grandeur of Monsieur de Sartines."

"Madame," said De Richelieu, kissing the tips of her fingers, "your host is Monsieur de Sartines, who has honored my house for the day. The invitation was sent in my name, but that was our little joke."

"Indeed!" said the comtesse, who felt a vague

disquiet at this little joke in which the minister of police played a part, but did not show it. "And how are the philosophers, dear De Sartines? And how are the fools, Monsieur de Joyeuse?"

"I do not know, Madame," replied De Joyeuse. "Ask Monsieur de Richelieu."

De Richelieu raised his eye-glass and examined De Joyeuse through it.

"From all appearances, Madame," said he, "they are very well."

"You were asking after the health of the philosophers, Madame," said De Sartines.

"Thank you," replied the lady, taking a seat. "Monsieur de Richelieu has informed me that they are very well. Monsieur de Joyeuse, a footstool."

"So on the earth rested the foot of Venus," said De Richelieu as De Joyeuse placed the footstool.

"Oh, Monsieur," sighed the comtesse, "the earth was not flat like a footstool in the days of that seraphic lady; though flat it is to-day—flat, stale, and unprofitable."

"And what has staled it, Madame?" asked De Joyeuse in a voice of mock commiseration.

"I have had a loss, alas! that you alone can replace, Monsieur."

"A loss?"

"I have lost my monkey. Dear De Sartines, I am hungry, and the wit of these gentlemen is not satisfying."

"Madame, I expect immediately Madame de Stenlis."

"Oh, De Stenlis! They say at the character dance given by Monsieur de Duras the other day she could neither eat nor smile."

"She had lost her heart, then."

"No, Monsieur; she had remembered her character."

Again the door flew open.

"Madame de Stenlis."

"Am I late?" cried the new-comer. "Dear Monsieur de Richelieu, forgive me. Monsieur de Joyeuse, good morning. Monsieur de Sartines, you may kiss my hand if you will promise not to bite it with a compliment. *Chère Célestine*—" the comtesse arose and the two women embraced. "You are looking younger than ever."

"And you too, dearest Marguérite. We were just saying how well you kept your years. But Monsieur de Richelieu is not your host. Monsieur de Sartines it is who has sent us invitations in Monsieur de Richelieu's name—quite a charming

idea, though I don't know the meaning of it in the least—only that it sounds like a conspiracy.”

Madame de Stenlis turned to the maréchal.

“Sounds like a conspiracy? Why, it is one. Well, Monsieur de Richelieu, now that you have inveigled me here to be the guest of Monsieur de Sartines, what have you to say for yourself?”

“Only this, Madame, that a lady invited herself to my house to-day, and as I can not receive her I have asked Monsieur de Sartines to play the part of host.”

“And who is this lady, pray?”

“Madame la Baronne Linden.”

“Then, Monsieur,” declared Madame de Stenlis, “if that lady is to be of your party to-day, I for one shall retire.”

“I also,” said Madame d'Harlancourt, rising from her chair.

“Patience, Madame,” said the maréchal. “Look at Monsieur de Sartines.”

De Sartines was smiling.

“Pray take your seat again, Madame,” said he. “This woman has invited herself to the house of Monsieur de Richelieu only to be received by the minister of police, who has her warrant of arrest already prepared and in his pocket.”

Oh, *ma foi!* how funny!" cried Madame de Stenlis, clapping her hands.

De Joyeuse, who had turned white at the name of the woman who had douched him with water the day before, flushed with excitement at De Sartines' words.

At that moment a servant entered with the announcement that Beauregard had arrived, and De Sartines, excusing himself, went out for a moment. When he returned he found the guests all grouped around the *maréchal*, chattering and cross-questioning him. There was an air of hilarity about them that might have been the reflection of the grim satisfaction shown by the face of De Sartines as he entered the room.

"The trap is set," said De Sartines. "We only wait now for the mouse, who, by the way, is late. Never mind, we shall certainly not wait *déjeuner*."

A single stroke from the great clock in the courtyard announced half past twelve, and the last vibration had scarcely died away when the great doors dividing the reception from the dining-room opened wide, disclosing the portly form of the majordomo, and behind him the crystal, snow, and flowers of the service, the lackeys rigid behind each chair, and the gallery where the musicians sat, with its carv-

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ings of oak that so well matched the tapestried walls. With the opening of the doors came the murmur of violins and the voice of the majordomo: "Your Excellency, *déjeuner* is served."

CHAPTER VI

THE RAT, THE CAT, AND THE CORN

IT was no part of Madame Linden's plan to arrive early at Monsieur de Richelieu's, and it was not till a quarter to one that her carriage turned into the courtyard of the hôtel.

She alighted, passed up the steps, entered the great hall and looked around her. Talking to one of the servants who stood grouped by the door of the reception-room was a man who, when he saw the new-comer, broke off his conversation and came to her.

"Madame la Baronne Linden?" said Beauregard, bowing.

"That is my name."

"Then, Madame," said Beauregard in a voice low enough not to be heard by the others in the hall, "it is my unpleasant duty to inform you that Monsieur le Duc is not receiving to-day; Monsieur de Sartes, the lieutenant-general of police, has given

invitations to several people, however, and the company is now at *déjeuner*."

"Ah," said she, seeing at once that some trickery on the part of De Sartines was behind all this. "Well, as I am here, I shall see Monsieur de Sartines. Lead me to him."

"Madame will, I am afraid, have to wait till *déjeuner* is over. If she will come into the reception-room?"

Madame Linden, boiling at this insult, but outwardly calm, followed Beauregard.

Beauregard hated this business. He had, in fact, dropped the case the night before, telling De Sartines that there was no more to be discovered about De Lussac, which was the truth. He knew that De Lussac was hopelessly lost; he considered all this manœuvring needless embroidery on a case which had been brought to a successful conclusion. He was, however, utterly ignorant of the awful weapon in the possession of Madame Linden.

He ushered her into the reception-room and closed the door.

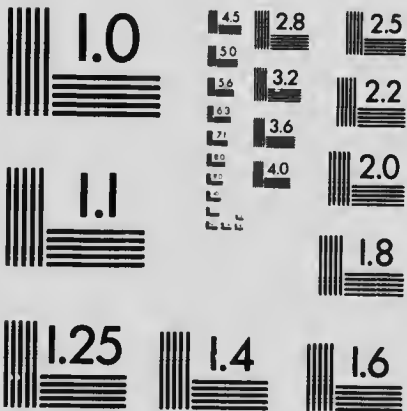
"Pray be seated, Madame."

She took a seat. He also sat down. At this her keen mind knew at once the truth. She was under arrest, detained here till the creatures who were



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breakfasting in the next room had leisure to look at her ere she was deported to the conciergerie.

"Monsieur," said she, "I must thank you for your courtesy."

"In what way, Madame?"

"In the way in which you have performed an unpleasant duty. But Monsieur de Sartines keeps me, I think."

"Madame," said Beauregard, "it is my earnest hope that he will not keep you long."

"Oh, it is his intention to keep me for years, but it is not my intention to be kept."

Beauregard shook his head.

"And certainly not to be kept waiting," she finished, rising from her chair and approaching the door of the banqueting-room.

"Madame!" cried Beauregard, rising from his chair, "that is the door of the banqueting-room."

"All the better. I am hungry."

To the horror of Beauregard, she flung the door open and stood looking at the company, who dropped their knives and forks at this extraordinary interruption.

The majordomo, who was directing the service, stood as though he had suddenly been turned to



Just for a second she stood staring at them



stone; the lackeys gaped, and De Joyeuse, who was in the act of raising a glass of champagne to his lips, spilt it on his coat.

Just for a second she stood staring at them, and then she broke into a peal of laughter.

"*Ma foi!*" cried she, "Monsieur de Sartines, Monsieur de Joyeuse, Madame de Stenlis and the Comtesse d'Harlancourt all round one table! Poor table!" She turned her back on them and came toward Beauregard.

"Now you will see something funny," said she.

Beauregard wiped the sweat from his brow; but he had no time to think, for De Sartines, flushed with wine and anger, serviette in hand, was at the door; behind him came the others.

"I told you you would see something funny," said the baroness, still addressing the unfortunate Beauregard.

"You!" cried De Sartines, whose anger now had so mastered him that he could not find words.

"Why," she cried, utterly ignoring him as De Joyeuse entered, followed by the others, "here is something funnier still!"

"Well, *cocotte!*" burst out De Sartines, the brute in him predominating. "You have arrived at last?"

"Monsieur," said the baroness, flushing over neck and face, "you shall pay me for that word."

Beauregard, who could scarcely contain his indignation, made a movement.

"Monsieur Beauregard," said De Sartines, "leave the room."

Beauregard bowed low, then he left the room.

"Monsieur," said the baroness, turning to De Sartines and suddenly changing her tone, "you have arrested me?"

"That is so."

"I am in your power."

"Precisely."

"As you are strong, Monsieur, be merciful."

"Madame, to such as you I am merciless."

"And you, Madame?" said the baroness, turning to Madame de Stenlis.

"She speaks to me!" said Madame de Stenlis, turning to Madame d'Harlancourt.

"And you, Madame?" said the baroness, turning to Madame d'Harlancourt.

"She speaks to me!" cried Madame d'Harlancourt, turning to Madame de Stenlis.

The baroness turned her back on them and faced De Sartines.

"Monsieur," said she, "we grow on what we feed."

You have fed on mercilessness; merciless will I be. Do you think for a moment, Monsieur, that I would have attacked you unless I had been armed to the teeth?"

"Aha!" thought De Richelieu, who, you will have noticed, took no part in the baiting of this possibly powerful woman, "we shall see something now."

"Armed to the teeth, and I will destroy your complacence with one word." She turned to the others. "Look on Monsieur de Sartine's face as I say the word; study it."

"Well, Madame," said De Sartines, folding his arms, "say your word."

"Porcheron!" said the baroness.

"*Cordieu!*" cried De Sartines, starting back as if she had struck him.

"Porcheron!" cried the baroness again, advancing toward him while he retreated before her as though the word were a whip. Then of a sudden he regained his self-possession.

"Madame," said he, "I must speak with you alone."

"Monsieur," replied she, "I prefer speaking to you in public."

"I forbid it!"

She laughed grimly, then, after a moment's re-

flection: "Very well, Monsieur," she said, "let us speak in private. This window opens upon the terrace; let us go out."

De Sartines opened the window and followed her out on the terrace, leaving the others amazed at the turn things had taken; all but De Richelieu, who, however, said nothing, pretending an astonishment equal to theirs.

"Now, Monsieur," said the baroness, when they were alone, "let us be explicit." She took a paper from her pocket and handed it to him. He looked at it; it was a copy of the contract, exact in every detail, made in her handwriting. Having glanced at it, he folded it and placed it in his pocket.

"Well, Madame," said he, "it seems you have been at great trouble to place yourself in this position."

"What position, Monsieur?"

"My prisoner, and a prisoner of the state until your death."

She made an impatient gesture.

"When will you learn to understand me? Let us be clear. You intend to imprison me?"

De Sartines bowed.

"Well, Monsieur, by doing so you will inevitably

ruin yourself. The original of that document is in the hands of a friend of mine; I have arranged to inform him every day at a certain hour that I am alive and free. Should he not hear from me, say, to-morrow, he is instructed to place that document in the hands of Monsieur de Mamecou, the vice-chancellor. I leave you to guess the result."

It was at this moment that De Sartines perceived quite clearly that he was lost, unless he could propitiate or circumvent this subtle intelligence against which he had pitted himself.

"Madame," said he, "this document was in the keeping of Monsieur de Richelieu."

"Indeed? Well, it is in his keeping no longer. Oh, believe me, Monsieur, the game is now in my hands; I can break you like a china figure at any moment I like. And now, do you know what you are thinking? You are thinking: When this woman leaves here I shall have her followed by my agents and I shall find out with whom she has placed the weapon; I shall arrest him and search his house. Well, Monsieur, if, when I leave here, I find out that I am being followed, I shall take a very drastic course. I shall leave Paris for three days and let things take their way."

"*Mordieu!*" said De Sartines, upon whose face the sweat was standing, "all this is beside the point."

"Which point, Monsieur?"

"Why, *ma foi!* that you are considering me in the light of an enemy. I, who have no personal animosity to you at all. Ah, Madame, too late I have perceived your genius. Even now an alliance—"

"An alliance with you! Come, Monsieur, we are wasting valuable time, and I have my monkeys to attend to."

She turned and reëntered the room where the others were all standing.

De Sartines, behind her, filled with fury and consternation, still wore an appearance of unconcern.

"And now, Monsieur," said the baroness, "that we have finished business, let us have some pleasure. I am hungry."

"If madame will join us at table—"

"Sit at table with those! No, Monsieur. Besides, I am only hungry for my dessert."

Madame De Stenlis turned from De Joyeuse, with whom she had been speaking, to the Comtesse d'Harlancourt, and laughed.

"Madame," said the baroness, "Monsieur de Sartines' power is limitless, and I am the master of Monsieur de Sartines."

"Surely, Madame, his mistress?" put in the comtesse.

"Monsieur de Sartines, you will kindly reply to the comtesse, who has twice insulted me."

Now, for the comtesse, Madame de Stenlis and De Joyeuse, the minister of police had that contempt which the police official had for all those in his power. In that bureau of his where we have seen him writing, he had their whole histories, and it was the fate of these unfortunates that their histories were in themselves accusations. D'Harlancourt had not poisoned her first husband, according to popular report, but she had ruined three men and was infamous. De Joyeuse was a cheat who had used cogged dice, betrayed women, beaten the town for three years and was suspected of worse crimes than these. Madame de Stenlis was a neurotic unprintable. One may fancy the rage of De Sartines at being jockeyed before all these whom with one sweep of his hand he could have sequestered in *La Force* or *Bicêtre*; more especially as he perceived that they were covertly laughing at him.

"Well, Madame," cried he, turning on Madame d'Harlancourt with a face that astonished her, "what now? I am the host here to-day. Must my guests be insulted?"

"Corbleu!" cut in the baroness, "that is not the way to speak to a woman of that sort. Speak, Monsieur, as you spoke to me—or take the consequences."

At this threat so openly made, Madame de Stenlis tittered. It was the last straw. Furious, unable to attack the strong woman who had him, literally, in her power, he attacked the weak.

"Madame Linden has explained herself to me; she has a power which will enable her to be of service to the state of France—and you insult her. You! *Dieu de Dieu!* what am I minister of police for if I do not know what you fancy hidden? Shall I speak, Madame? Shall I speak?"

"Cease!" cried Madame d'Harlancourt, who had become white and whose eyes were fixed on the man before her. She had retreated a few steps and was brought to a halt by a chair, whose back she seized.

No one laughed or smiled now; an atmosphere of terror filled the room, for the rage of De Sartines chilled the heart; no one could tell what might not happen next. De Joyeuse glanced at the door, Madame de Stenlis pressed her handkerchief to her lips. Only De Richelieu was calm, and the baroness.

"Make her go on her knees, De Sartines."

"Never!" cried the unfortunate woman, shaking, white, terrified, yet making one more effort to retain her dignity.

De Sartines took one step toward her; his eyes were blazing and his fist clenched.

Annihilated, mesmerized by his glance and appalled at his fury, she sank weeping on her knees.

De Joyeuse slunk toward the door.

"Monsieur de Joyeuse, come back," said the baroness.

"Madame, I have an engagement elsewhere," replied the fashion-plate, his hand on the door-handle.

"Monsieur de Sartines," said she, "I must ask you to recall Monsieur de Joyeuse, who also insulted me."

De Sartines, when Madame d'Harlancourt ordered him, had bridled his rage. He laughed grimly

"That is but just. Monsieur de Joyeuse, come back."

Monsieur de Joyeuse came back.

"Now," said the baroness to De Joyeuse, "on your knees beside that woman."

"Never!"

"Monsieur de Sartines, perhaps you will give the order?"

De Sartines looked at De Joyeuse, and without a

word pointed to the floor beside the comtesse, who, with hands twisting her lace handkerchief, was still kneeling.

De Joyeuse for half a moment seemed on the point of rebellion, then with a laugh took his place beside the comtesse.

Madame de Stenlis was no fool; she recognized that her turn was coming, that she and the others were entirely under the thumb of De Sartines, who for some reason was entirely under the thumb of the baroness. She tripped across to where De Joyeuse was kneeling, and knelt beside him, with a laugh that almost turned the tables on her tormentor.

"Come, De Sartines," said she, "kneel beside me and let us pray for the soul of one dead to society."

Madame d'Harlancourt picked up at this and folded her hands, and De Joyeuse assumed an air of devotion.

"Does madame refer to the soul of the Comte d'Ys?" asked the baroness in a suave voice.

At this remark, which showed such a destructive knowledge of the past of Madame de Stenlis, De Sartines started back, De Richelieu almost exploded with mirth, and the group on the floor wilted.

"And you, Monsieur de Joyeuse," went on the pitiless one, "for whom are you about to pray? The watchman Laverolles killed, by accident, no doubt, but still killed—"

"Madame," cut in De Sartines, terrified himself by her knowledge of things, a knowledge which she had acquired from no higher an authority than Rosine. "Madame, that is enough—"

"Monsieur," she replied, "I only intended to say that Laverolles, though an honest man who never used coggled dice, betrayed women, drank to excess or was known as a *maquereau*, living on the money of a woman old enough to be his mother—I only intended to say that this man, though honest, was not possessed of a social soul, and that Monsieur de Joyeuse's time would be wasted in praying for it. On your knees!"

De Joyeuse, ghastly with anger and sweating, was preparing to rise.

"On your knees!"

De Joyeuse, under that voice which pressed on him like a hand, was sinking back on his knees, when like a thunderclap came an incident that struck the actors and spectators of this little comedy motionless as people of stone.

The door swung open and a lackey's voice announced, "Monsieur de Maupeou."

The vice-chancellor of France stood for a moment staring at the extraordinary scene before him. He was a gloomy-faced individual, and his great wig and sober attire did not detract from the expression of his face.

"Why," cried the baroness, who had met him once at a reception, "'tis Monsieur de Maupeou! Pray, Monsieur, do not think us mad; we are only rehearsing a little comedy. Do not move," to the trio on the floor; "Monsieur de Maupeou will not mind our finishing the rehearsal. Monsieur de Sartines is our stage-manager. Monsieur de Sartines, Madame d'Harlancourt is shifting her position."

De Sartines turned his back on De Maupeou after having bowed to him, and faced the actors.

His glance was quite enough to keep them as they were, even if their *amour propre* had not urged them to keep up before De Maupeou the pretense of a rehearsal.

They smiled.

"And this play?" said De Maupeou, taking his seat on the *fauteuil* indicated by De Richelieu.

"'Tis called *The Rat, the Cat, and the Corn*. I am the miller's wife, and these are the rat and the

cats. Monsieur de Sartines is the stage-manager. Monsieur de Richelieu possessed the manuscript, but he has lost it, so we are rehearsing from memory."

"Madame," said De Sartines in a humble voice, "shall we not put off our little rehearsal till a more favorable opportunity?"

"Why, yes, Monsieur, after the rat and the cats have said once more their little piece. Now, attention. Place your hands together so, and say after me once again the line:

"*'Nous sommes rats, chats, fats.'*"

"*'Nous sommes rats, chats, fats,'* repeated the actors, with a frightful assumption of gaiety.

"And we humbly beg your pardon," went on their instructress.

"And we humbly beg your pardon."

"Right. Now you may rise. Monsieur de Sartines!"

"Yes, Madame?"

"My carriage. And remember that you are coming to supper with me to-night in the Rue Coq Héron, at eight precisely."

De Sartines, taken aback by this invitation which was also a command, could only bow.

"Yes, Madame."

She turned to Madame de Stenlis and the comtesse.

"Ladies, you will be with me this evening at eight punctually."

They glanced at De Sartines, then they bowed.

"And you, too, Monsieur," said she, turning to De Joyeuse.

He bowed.

Then she turned to De Maupeou, and De Sartines felt sick at heart.

"Monsieur de Maupeou, you, too, are invited. Will you not make one of us?"

"I shall be charmed," replied De Maupeou, who scented something strange in all this.

"You will, I hope. My carriage, Monsieur de Sartines."

De Richelieu himself called for her carriage, and De Sartines escorted her to it.

"Madame," said he at the carriage door, "I pray you to think over everything in your mind. The play of the rat, the cat, and the corn is very amusing. What is the charge for the copyright and the manuscript? Shall we say a hundred thousand francs?"

"Monsieur," she replied, "that is the price of my

jewels. We shall see about the price of the play after it has been performed."

The carriage drove away, and he returned to the reception-room, half broken with anxiety and feeling as though he were inclosed by a net.

De Joyeuse and the two women were making their adieus to De Richelieu.

"Good-by, De Sartines, till this evening," said Madame de Stenlis as she left.

"Till this evening," said Madame d'Harlancourt.

"Till this evening, dear De Sartines," said De Joyeuse.

"Till this evening," replied De Sartines, bowing. He read in their faces, their voices, and their manner the hint of what they guessed—that De Sartines was to be the first protagonist in madame's little comedy, and that De Sartines would have at her hands a sufficiently lively time; not one of them would not have given the rags of his or her reputation to see the minister of police in the dust, and he knew it.

De Maupeou, who had called to see De Richelieu relative, so he said, to the question of a suit which was pending at the courts and who had finished speaking to him on the matter, now turned to go.

"Till this evening, Monsieur de Sartines."

De Sartines bowed as he left the room. Then when the maréchal and the minister found themselves alone, De Sartines turned savagely on the duc.

"What is this?"

"*Ma foi*, I don't know; but madame seems to have turned the tables very completely on you, my dear Minister."

"*Cordieu!* turned the tables upon me! I should think so. You have been robbed."

De Richelieu clapped his hand to his pocket.

"You have been robbed of that cursed contract. She has possession of it; she has made a copy of it; she holds it like a sword, *ventre Dieu*; and she has the will to use it."

"*Ciel!*" cried Richelieu, the picture of aghastness, striking himself on the forehead as he spoke, "I might have known when she said that word 'Porcheron!' I fancied she had only got wind of the thing and was holding you in check by the name. But it is impossible. The paper is secreted in the drawer of my bureau and no one ever is admitted to the library. Ah! Ah!"

"What?" asked De Sartines, almost startled at the old maréchal's expression.

"I see it all now."

"Yes, yes?"

"I know the thief!"

"Yes, yes?"

"The only person possible. Armand de Lussac! He alone has had access to my library. He came the other day on a visit—scamp, traitor! He said he was tired of Paris and wanted a change. Ah, *mon Dieu!* to think that I have been robbed by a kinsman!"

"Well, Monsieur, your kinsman is safe in the Bastile. If he has taken the thing, then he must have passed it on to this infernal woman. The course before you is clear."

"Yes?"

"You must visit De Lussac in the Bastile and exert your power upon him. You must make him write a letter to madame ordering her to deliver up to you the paper that has been stolen from you."

"*Ma foi,*" said Richelieu, "that is not a bad idea. One can but try. Of course, he will deny it."

"All the same, you must try. Threaten him with lifelong imprisonment if he does not do as you dictate, and to seal the matter show him these papers." De Sartines took a packet from his pocket. "They are the papers of the Society of the Midi, which I

found in the orange-tree tub in his courtyard. When he sees them he will know he is lost unless he surrenders."

De Richelieu took the papers and placed them in his pocket.

"There is one thing," said he. "This visit must be private; no one must know that I have made it. I refuse to be implicated further in this affair. To have it said that Monsieur de Richelieu visited his kinsman in the Bastile; to have it said that—"

"Set your mind at rest," replied De Sartines. "I will give you an order, armed with which you will be admitted without question, or examination; you can manage with the brim of your hat and your cloak held to your eyes that no one will see your face. You consent?"

"*Ma foi!*" replied Richelieu, "yes. But one thing troubles me."

"What is that?"

"De Maupeou's arrival here to-day. He is your enemy."

"He is."

"Well, he came to speak to me about some law business. That was only a pretext; he had nothing important to say. Besides, all Paris thinks that I am at Versailles. No, I am sure that woman sent

him a secret hint to come here, that he would see something that would interest him."

"Possibly."

"She has invited him to her house this evening, Comte; this means mischief, and if I were you, I should—"

"Yes?"

"Buy her or imprison her."

De Sartines made no reply. He could not explain that he had attempted to buy her and that imprisonment was totally out of the question.

CHAPTER VII

THE SPIRIT OF THE BASTILE

D^r LUSSAC, after that glance which showed him the battlemented wall and the silhouette of the passing sentry, sat for a while, his face buried in his hands. One might be tempted to say that despair does not exist except in a mind diseased, unless perhaps as a passing phase, as now in the case of De Lussac. De Lussac for a moment felt and measured despair. For a moment only, and then his mind returned to him.

What brought him back to balance was chiefly the thought that his position was of his own making, and that there was a certain justice in his imprisonment. He had matched himself against society as represented by De Sartines, and the game had gone against him. It was useless to pule and complain; it was unmanly. Then youth, that giant, came to his assistance. "Courage," said youth; "the game is not lost yet. Men have escaped from prisons worse than this. A hundred things may happen. Be prepared."

He rose to his feet and paced the floor of his cell. The light was now so dim that he could scarcely distinguish the table, the chair, and the bed; but he did not think of this. Prisoner, his mind was wandering far and wide like a bird seeking a resting-place, some point of hope.

He remembered, now, that Madame Linden was in full possession of the facts of his case; though she knew nothing of his imprisonment she knew of his danger; she was in possession of De Sartines' secret and she would certainly use that knowledge to help him—only, perhaps, to bring about her own ruin!

This thought made him forget all things else, even his own position. Ah! if she were to fall into the trap, become entangled in the wheels of this infernal machine that held him! And he would never know. If his imprisonment were to last till his death, he would never know.

Maddened by this thought, he broke out, cursing himself, cursing De Fleury, the men he had sought to rescue, De Sartines and the world. Then he became calm again; his mind refused to dwell on so frightful an idea. He would escape; other men had escaped from prisons worse than this.

He began to form plans wild enough and sense-

less enough. He would bribe the turnkey, forgetting that to leave the Bastille he would have to pass the guard at the main door, the guard at the inner gate, and the guard at the drawbridge. He would break the bars of the window and lower himself by means of his sheets torn up and twisted into ropes, forgetting that if he succeeded he would find himself in the inner courtyard, hopeless to escape from as the tomb.

Engaged in these thoughts, he was suddenly brought back to reality by the sound of a key in the lock of the cell door; a bolt was shot back, the door opened, and his jailer appeared, lamp in hand.

A man followed the jailer, carrying a tray on which was the prisoner's supper and the paper, pen and ink with which every prisoner was supplied, so that he might put in writing his complaints to the governor.

"I will be back in an hour for the lamp," said the jailer.

"For the lamp!"

"*Ma foi*, yes. Those are the regulations. You don't want more than an hour for your supper."

"Heavens!" said De Lussac. "They have deprived me of liberty, and they are now going to deprive me of light?"

"I know nothing of your liberty," said the jailer; "I only know the regulations." He went out and shut the door.

De Lussac turned to the food on the table. It consisted of a stew, some bread, and half a bottle of wine. The idea of food revolted him, still, he knew that not to eat was perhaps to fail if a sudden call came upon his energies. He sat down to the table.

There was something human about the food and the wine in this inhuman place, this nightmare of stone.

As he sat eating, a slight sound attracted his attention and glancing on the floor, he saw a rat. An old gray rat which had slipped into the cell through some hole in the masonry, attracted, perhaps, by the smell of the food.

He glanced at it, terrified by the thought that he would find himself alone in the darkness with such company as this. His imagination painted swarms of rats running over him, perhaps attacking him. He was about to push his chair away from the table when the rat, whose bright eyes were now fixed on him, drew closer and then sat up on its haunches like a dog.

It was begging for food, just as a poodle begs,

and De Lussac stared at it in astonishment without moving. The rat kept its position for a moment and then of a sudden it turned a complete somersault. Three times it did this before sitting up again to beg.

It was a performing rat, the pet, perhaps the friend, of some unhappy prisoner now vanished.

He threw a piece of meat from the stew, and the rat whisked away with it beneath the bed. Then, unable to eat any more, he sat with his elbows on the table till the key sounded again in the lock and the jailer entered.

"Well," said the man as he removed the things, "you've made small use of your pen and paper."

De Lussac started. He had little hope of any appeal made to the governor.

"I will use them to-morrow," he said. "Tell me, was this cell inhabited before I came here?"

"Till yesterday."

"The prisoner was liberated?"

"No, Monsieur; he died."

"Ah, he died! Who was he, then, and how long was he here?"

The man laughed; he was in a good humor, for the liberality of De Lussac in paying for the pen, ink and paper, and the bottle of wine he had cracked on

the strength of the louis, warmed his heart toward the prisoner.

"Now you are asking questions! Who was he? *Ma foi*, he was the Marquis de Viverolles, and he came here before my time. I was sorry to lose him. No matter; 'tis the way we must all go."

The Marquis de Viverolles! De Lussac had heard of him in his youth as the handsomest and wittiest man in France, who suddenly became extinguished in the last years of the reign of the Grand Monarch, just as Fouquet had become extinguished in the first years of that illustrious reign. The man who had graced everything that he touched, charmed all whom he knew, lent his wit to so many men, his heart to so many women, his purse to so many friends, and his genius—to a rat!

The spirit of the Bastile lay in that page of unwritten history.

Consumed by the mournfulness of it and feeling in it a pointer of his own fate, De Lussac, scarcely answering the "Good night" of his jailer, flung himself on his bed.

After a while the absolute blackness of the cell was broken by a ray of light. The moon had risen and a beam showed up the bars of the window space.

As the light broke the darkness, a faint sound came from the floor of the cell. It was the friend of the Marquis de Viverolles picking up the crumbs that had fallen from the table.

De Lussac, as he lay listening and watching the beam upon the wall, instead of giving himself over to despair, continued to exercise his mind on plans for escape.

Nothing could seem more hopeless, yet he showed his philosophy by clinging to hope.

"Come," he said to himself, "I have determined to leave this place. If I can not leave it in the body, I shall leave it in the spirit by dying. Well, then, let me aim first at my bodily release. Let me be calm, strong and watchful. To be watchful, I must conciliate my jailer and keep my eyes open for any chance; to be strong I must eat, and to be calm I must sleep.

"Let me, then, sleep; it is the first step to that plan which I have not yet formed but which will come."

He turned on his side, but sleep, which comes to children more readily than to philosophers, held aloof from him for a while. Then, suddenly, the exhaustion caused by the excitement of the day fell on him like a cloak. He slept, and when he woke

he found the jailer entering his cell and daylight shining through the high window.

His first thoughts on wakening and recognizing the place where he was, were the thoughts upon which he had fallen asleep.

The jailer, used to the vagaries of new prisoners, was surprised at the cheerful face of his new charge.

"Well," said he, "you seem to have slept. Here is a jug of water for you, and you shall have some coffee in an hour's time. We don't starve our people here. And for dinner you can have what you please to pay for."

"What I please to pay for?" asked De Lussac, who did not know the truth that La Bastille was in reality a vast and formidable hotel, of which the governor was the keeper.

"Certainly."

"Well, then," said De Lussac, "I will have for dinner—my release."

The man laughed, and De Lussac felt he had gained a point.

"I will even pay you a hundred thousand francs for that same dinner," went on the comte. "Two hundred—three hundred. My rent-roll is three hundred thousand francs—well, I will give a year's rent for that which will cost you nothing."

"You are like the rest of them," replied the man, placing the pitcher of fresh water on the table. "All promises. One would think I had only to open the door and say, 'Monsieur What's-your-name, walk out.'"

He left the cell, shutting the door behind him and locking it, and De Lussac lay down on his bed again.

After a while he rose up, drew the table beneath the window space, stood on the table and, springing up, clung to the window bars. He saw again the battlemented wall and against the sky-line the form of a sentry passing along it, just as he had seen a passing sentry on the evening before. The sight depressed him. He began to recognize that in the Bastille the guardianship of prisoners had been reduced to a science. Drawing the table back to its place, he sat down on his bed again, this time with his chin between his hands.

"All this is a system," said he, "and there is no system without some flaw. Let me find the flaw. These jailers of mine have been reduced from living and thinking men to automata; surely that is a point for a mind alive and fresh to work upon."

Two hours passed, and then the jailer reappeared with the coffee and roll which formed the *déjeuner* of the Bastille; dinner was served at two o'clock.

"What time is it?" asked De Lussac as he sat down at the table.

"Time?" said the man. "We have no need for time here. It's time for your coffee. Time! *Ma foi*, if you once begin about that, you will become like that merry gentleman down the passage, who sings all day. The clock with us is the *déjeuner* hour, the dinner hour and the supper hour—a very good timepiece, too." He laughed as he went out.

De Lussac, with a sinking feeling at his heart, drank his coffee and crumbled his roll. As he did so he heard something whisk on the floor. It was the rat. Hastily he flung a piece of the roll and the rat vanished with it. The thing and its antics stirred him almost to terror.

Then, to divert his thoughts, he took the pen, ink and paper and began to write his letter to the governor.

It was a short letter, simply asking for an interview, and having folded the sheet he fastened it with a wafer and directed it. Then he sat down again on the side of his bed. It was at this moment, perhaps, that he first felt the terrible sensation, almost impossible to put in words, the feeling that time has stopped—that the hour is no longer a boat taking us to any destination.

When the jailer appeared at two, bearing the prisoner's dinner, he found De Lussac seated on the side of his bed, staring vacantly before him.

He refused the food. He did not even refer to the letter which was lying on the table; he seemed like a man dazed by a blow. Philosophy, that toy of the mind destroyed at once by grief or pain, was no longer with this unfortunate gentleman. La Bastille had at last got him firmly in her grip. La Bastille, that living pain made from dead stone, that despair embodied in masonry, had taken his mind prisoner as well as his body.

The jailer withdrew, grumbling to himself. He knew the symptoms and he expected trouble. At three o'clock, when he brought the prisoner a change of linen, De Lussac was no longer seated on the bed; he was pacing the cell feverishly. His face was white, and he turned such a ferocious glance on his visitor that the man hastily withdrew.

"Never mind," said he: "a little starvation will bring him to his senses. We shall see what he has to say at supper-time.

For half an hour after the jailer left him De Lussac continued pacing the floor. Then, suddenly, he broke out, shouting, raving, beating upon the door with his fists, furious like a trapped animal. He

seemed fighting and struggling with something; he was struggling with La Bastile.

The viewless one, whose integuments were the walls and the doors, whose jewelry was the locks, the chains and the bars, was at last at grips with him. He had said to himself, "Courage! I will disregard her, I will escape from her. If I can not leave her in the body, I will kill myself and free my soul."

She had replied, "It is your soul I want. Only men of spirit kill themselves; I will take your spirit away. Men do not kill themselves here: I kill their spirits. They make friends of rats. They are brave, they threaten me with suicide, but they live to forget all that, and they die laughing and singing like that merry gentleman down the corridor."

Then he struck her and she struck him, using only his own force in returning the blow. He shouted at her, and she shouted back in echoes of his own voice. He wrestled with her, and she flung him on the bed.

Spent, foaming at the mouth, haggard and dulled, he lay while she stood over him—towers and battlements—armed, silent and victorious. She had reduced him without killing him. That was her victory. It would go on like this, the struggle of the

soul against her and her struggle against the soul, breaking the spirit, debasing the man till he began to play with rats or sing songs to her like the merry gentleman down the corridor.

His fury had expended itself and he was now calm; his mind cleared, and deep shame overcame him for the moment. He recognized with horror that he had been acting like a wild beast drunk with captivity.

He sat up on the bed, and scarcely had he done so when a noise came from the corridor outside the cell; the bolts shot back, the door opened, and the jailer appeared.

The man looked at De Lussac for a moment.

"You are better, I see. That is well, for there is a visitor for you."

De Lussac sprang to his feet as a man, wearing a dark cloak and a broad-brimmed hat, entered the cell. The man's face was invisible, for he held a fold of the cloak over it; nothing but the eyes, bright and piercing, could be seen beneath the shadow of the hat-brim.

For a moment De Lussac, as he glanced at this sinister figure, fancied that this was some emissary of the king or De Sartines come to despatch him; only for a moment. The unknown, without

lowering his cloak, said, speaking to the jailer: "Leave us and close the door without locking it. Take your post at the end of the corridor and wait for me there."

The jailer went out and closed the door; the cloak fell from the face of the unknown, and De Lussac found himself fronting his kinsman, the Duc de Richelieu.

"Well, Monsieur," said the duc, taking off his hat and flinging it on the table while he let the cloak slip from his shoulders, "this is a nice position in which you have placed yourself!"

De Lussac could not speak for a moment. He stood with his hand grasping the back of the chair, while the duc, placing the cloak on the table beside the hat, continued: "A conspirator against the state, a De Lussac, a cousin of mine, and a robber. *Cordieu*, Monsieur, I dread to inquire further into your doings for fear of what I may find."

The sight of the duc and these words were like wine to De Lussac. His intellect, made clear by his past fury, was now like the atmosphere purged by a storm. Fortunately for himself, he had eaten nothing that day but a morsel of bread: in a second thoughts passed through his mind that in ordinary circumstances would have taken a minute in their

flight. He recognized that fate had at last given him his chance, and he took it.

"Monsieur," said he, "if you will take your seat on the side of that bed, I will take this chair; then we can converse the more easily. To what do you refer?"

"To what do I refer?" replied the maréchal, taking his seat on the side of the bed. "I refer to your conduct, Monsieur."

"You called me a robber."

"And I call you it again. You came to my house. I offered you hospitality; you opened my bureau; you or the woman you know of abstracted a private paper—"

"Stay, Monsieur. Do you refer to Madame Linden?"

"I do."

"How is she implicated in this matter?"

"How? She called upon me last night; that is how. She took advantage of my absence from the room—I don't know how. At all events, the thing is gone. Between you, you have done this act. Don't speak. I did not come here to argue, but to dictate. That document must be returned."

"And if it is not returned?"

"Then, Monsieur, you are a prisoner for life."

Oh, I know you say to yourself, 'I am the Comte de Lussac. I have powerful friends; they will free me.' Well, I can only reply, documents have been discovered in your house of such a nature that, should we use them against you—well, you are hopelessly lost."

"Documents! What documents?"

The maréchal laughed.

"You shall see them with your own eyes."

He placed his hand in his pocket and produced a small bundle of papers. De Lussac instantly recognized the papers of the Society of the Midi. He started in his chair and his face flushed despite himself.

"Well," said De Richelieu, exhibiting the bundle, "what do you say to that? Look; examine them. Are they genuine? What do you say to that?"

"Monsieur," said De Lussac, taking the papers in his hand and glancing at them, "I have only one thing to say—it seems I have been robbed just as you have been robbed, and before God I would sooner be robbed of documents like these than of a document like that, in which an infamous king and an infamous minister conspire to rob the people of their food. By a miraculous chance these documents have returned to me. Monsieur, can not you

see the hand of God in that? You can not? Then feel it!"

In a moment De Richelieu was on his back upon the bed, with De Lussac on top of him.

The attack was so sudden and unexpected that the maréchal had no time to cry out before the comte's thumb, pressing on his thyroid cartilage, made outcry impossible.

"Monsieur," said De Lussac, "I do not wish to kill you, but should it be needful I will do so."

With his free hand he began to unloose De Richelieu's scarf so as to gag him with it. Then he saw that it was unnecessary. The maréchal had lost consciousness; he looked as though he were dying. He felt horrified, but he had no time to ponder his feelings. He picked the precious packet of documents from the floor and thrust it into his pocket, put on the maréchal's belt and sword, put on the hat, put on the cloak, opened the cell door, raised the cloak to his face and left the cell, closing the door behind him.

The jailer was leaning against the wall at the end of the corridor. Seeing the man in the cloak, he came forward and locked and barred the cell door. He saw no difference between the man he had let into the cell and the man who had come out; there

was only a short inch of difference between the two. He turned the key in the lock and slid the bolts.

As he did this a faint and stifled cry came from the cell. De Lussac's heart scarcely changed its rhythm; he was beyond emotion. If the jailer attempted to open the door he would kill the man with the sword beside him; he would try to reach the carriage which he knew must be in waiting; failing in that, he would fight his way, sword in hand, as far as possible toward freedom.

The jailer paused for a moment with the keys in his hand, then he led the way from the cell along the corridor.

They had reached the heavy door leading to the staircase when muffled cries and the sound of some one beating on a door came after them.

"There he goes," said the turnkey. "He's in his tantrums again. He'll be breaking his furniture next. They generally do. Allow me, Monseigneur."

He opened the door leading to the stairs. De Lussac passed through, the man closed and locked the door and then led the way downward. As De Lussac followed, his heart, till now calm, became furiously alive; each downward step was an agony. What formalities were there still to be gone

through? Would he have to enter the governor's room? Would the guards at the main door ask to see the permit that doubtless De Richelieu had shown them? He knew that De Richelieu must have arrived in a carriage and that the carriage would be in waiting. Would De Richelieu's coachman fail to recognize him? Had De Richelieu brought one of his dogs with him? Had he by any chance brought a companion?

They reached the corridor below and the jailer began to unlock the great door leading to the corridor on which was situated the chamber of audience. The door opened slowly on its well-oiled hinges, and when they had passed through it closed with a sucking sound, as though La Bastille were catching her breath back with a sob at the escape of this victim.

But they were not free of her yet.

As they approached the chamber of audience a bar suddenly shot out, blocking their way. It was the pike of the Swiss on guard at the door of the room. The jailer, producing a paper from his belt, handed it to the man, who read it, raised his pike and allowed them to pass on.

Another ponderous door was opened; they passed through, and there at the end of the corridor De Lussac saw the sunlight shining through the open

main door, and at the steps a carriage drawn up and evidently waiting for De Richelieu.

The guards at the main door had still to be passed. There were half a dozen of them, some lounging on a bench inside the gateway, some on the steps; but as the mysterious figure of the man in the cloak drew near these gentlemen exhibited a studied indifference, turning and talking to one another. They did not even raise their eyes as De Lussac passed them, and the guards on the steps faced about, giving him their backs.

There were two carriages drawn up, one at the steps—a splendid vehicle blazoned on its panels with a coat of arms, and another very plain, without sign of armorial bearings, drawn up behind the first.

It was now that De Lussac's knowledge of heraldry saved him from making a terrible blunder, for the carriage at the steps bore the arms of Monsieur de Launay, the governor, who had evidently just arrived.

He turned to the plain vehicle and entered it, and the coachman on the box, who evidently suspected nothing, touched his horses with the whip and they started.

The man had asked for no directions; it was evident that his instructions had been laid down for

him, and De Lussac leaned back on the cushions, almost suffocated by his success and the nearness of freedom.

Suddenly the carriage stopped. It was the inner gateway, and the harsh voices of the guards could be heard interrogating the coachman. Then a face appeared at the window. It was the corporal of the guard. He peeped in, saluted the cloaked figure and withdrew. The carriage drove on, only to stop again at the drawbridge. Again came the voices of the guards and the voice of the coachman replying to them. He was evidently showing them his permit. They passed on, and now came the deep rumble of the wheels on the drawbridge, the grumble of La Bastille at the escape of her victim.

Now they were in the Rue Saint Antoine, free at last—for the moment.

De Lussac knew that at any minute the jailer might revisit his cell, find the trick that had been played on him, and then a cannon from the battlements would give tongue to the pursuit. Guards, Swiss soldiers, the agents of De Sartines, all would be on his track, ransacking Paris, turning out every pocket of the city where a man might hide.

It was imperative to leave the carriage and try to reach some place of safety. The carriage was evi-

dently taking him to De Richelieu's house, a place he dared not go. He had only one louis in his pocket; his face was known to a thousand men; he could not walk the streets with the cloak held to his eyes; he had no definite plan to guide him. Never was man in a more perplexing situation, yet he did not despair, and the thing that gave him confidence was the sword at his side.

"If the worst comes to the worst, I can only die," said he. "When I leave this carriage I must first seek Monsieur Blanc in the Rue Petit Versailles, and give him these papers to keep. Then—then—where shall I go? To whom shall I turn?"

He thought of Sophie Linden. Should he seek refuge at her house? Never! She was already attainted by him. Richelieu had said that the Porcheron contraband had been stolen, but De Lussac could scarcely believe that it was her work. Were he traced to her house and taken there, she would suffer as well as he.

He put the subject from his mind and addressed himself to the problem of how he was to leave the carriage without attracting the attention of the driver.

They were still in the Rue Saint Antoine, driving swiftly westward.

They had passed the Rue de Balais on the right and were drawing near the church of Petit Saint Antoine, when several drays laden with wood from the wood-yards of the Rue de la Planchette blocked the way and caused the carriage to slow. Instantly and like a discharging volcano the coachman of De Richelieu began storming at the carters, and cutting at them with his whip as though they were dogs. The whole social condition of France lay in that little episode, and the salvation, for the moment, of De Lussac, who, opening the carriage door and slipping out, closed the door gently and made for the Rue de Fourci, which they had just passed on the left.

The empty carriage drove on.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PORTE ST. BERNARD

TO IMAGINE that old jungle of a Paris in which De Lussac found himself now, on foot, without friends, pursued, or soon to be pursued by the police, and all but penniless, one must look at the Paris of the present day and contrast what is with what has vanished.

To the southward beyond the Bastille the Faubourg St. Antoine stretched toward Le Trône in great spaces of gardens and fields. Here one found the houses of religious orders: the *Filles de la Croix*, the *Enfants Trouvés*, *Notre Dame de Bon Secours*, *Ste. Marguerite* and half a dozen others; the great glass manufactory of the Rue de Reilly; Reilly itself, with its gardens and vast grounds.

Casting one's eyes to the southwest, one saw windmills twirling their arms at Petit Gentilly, the Faubourg St. Jacques, with its great spaces destitute of houses, broken only by the Val de Grace, the observatory and Saint Magloire, the Faubourg St.

Michel, fields and trees and windmills and country roads.

Westward Paris ended, as far as the crush of houses is concerned, a little southward of the Place Vendôme.

Where the Faubourg St. Honoré is now alive with traffic and business, then there was nothing but gardens, plots of land, tree-lined roads and the mansions of the nobility. Some of the most splendid houses in Paris were to be found here: the Hôtel Contad, the Hôtel Goebrian, the Hôtels de Charost, Montbazou, D'Aguesseau, and D'Evreux; the Hôtel de Duras, immense in its parallelogram of walled gardens, and the Hôtel de Chevilly in its triangular grounds at the foot of the Rue St. Honoré.

Northward the heights of Montmartre showed trees; the Faubourg St. Martin, trees and the roofs of the Hôpital St. Louis; the Faubourg du Temple, Courtille, Pincourt—trees, waste spaces, gardens, windmills.

But from the royal palace to the Bastille, and from the Temple to Sainte G n vi ve, across the river, there the houses were crowded, indeed: house-roofs, shrill spires, weathercocks, domes and towers; ten thousand weathercocks, a hundred spires, palace roofs and gilded domes; the blue

Seine straddled by the quaintest bridges. What a sight was that old Paris on a feast-day, with the bells of Saint Merri answering the bells of Saint Eustache, the carillon of Notre Dame answering the carillon of Saint Roche; Saint Martin, Saint Paul, Saint Victor and Sainte G n vieve starring the blue sky, each with a spire and a sparkle of sound; the windmills of Petit Gentilly beckoning to the windmills of Pincourt, and the blue Seine laughing through it all! How splendid, from a distance, it looked! But descend into those streets where De Lussac was making his way, and the splendor vanished. The sky-piercing spires of the churches, the roofs of the palaces were forgotten. Here one saw squalor and meanness, the half-starved dog and the half-starved child; rags and tatters and human ruin were evident on every side; one saw the remnants of a people devoured by long generations of kings, nobles and priests. Here one saw feast-days with nothing to eat, gilded virgins blessing the accursed, jeweled saints mocking the destitute, the king making thieves and De Sartines hanging them. Every law but the law of God, and the carriage of the Duc d'Aiguillon splashing the mud of the streets in the faces of the people.

But De Lussac had no eyes for the sights around

him. He had left the heavy cloak in the carriage, retaining only the hat, and he now became aware that the hat, so wide of brim and so ill matching his dress, was attracting the attention of the passers-by.

The Rue Petit Versailles, for which he was aiming, lay across the river; to reach it he would have to cross the Isle des Cygnes, so, making his way from the narrow and dismal street wherein he was, he struck into the Rue des Fauconniers, passed the Hôtel de Sens and by way of the Place Moneils found the Pont Marie. He crossed the Isle des Cygnes, a veritable little town made up of nine huge blocks of houses, and by the Pont de la Tournelle found the left bank and the Port au Vin.

So far he had not been recognized, only stared at; and, after all, that did not matter, unpleasant though it was. With renewed courage he took his way past the Fort de la Tournelle under the Porte St. Bernard and past the wine market; a long street of squalid houses brought him into the Rue Petit Versailles, known in the time of Louis XIII. as the Rue Vautrin. Here, at an old house that seemed nodding forward with the weight of years, De Lussac stopped, pulled the bell and was admitted.

In five minutes he came out again, walking with a lighter step. He had got rid of his papers. The

documents of the Society of the Midi were in safe keeping at last. Verily the fates were working with him, for not only had he got rid of the papers, but Monsieur Blanc had given him a piece of advice as to where he should go and with whom he should hide.

Unfortunately Monsieur Blanc could not give him a hat as well, and it would be necessary to cross Paris in the hat he was wearing, thus drawing the attention of every eye. As he reached the Porte St. Bernard, the great clock of the Hôtel de Bretonvillier, which was situated at the eastern angle of the Isle des Cygnes, began to strike the hour. Five heavy strokes sounded and died away. De Lussac paused. Would it be better for him to seek some hiding-place till darkness made it possible for him to cross Paris without being observed? There were wood-yards here, great empty spaces deserted by day, the camping-ground of thieves by night; the place seemed prepared for him to hide in. Should he hide? Impossible! The four hours of inaction before darkness were not to be thought of; besides, the pursuit was not yet upon him; even should he be recognized by friends, what did it matter, so long as he was recognized by none of De Sartines' agents?

So thinking, he passed under one of the arches of

the Porte St. Bernard, entered the Port au Vin and walked right into the arms of Monsieur Beauregard. Beauregard, who had come to this quarter of the city on some police business, had been walking along, thinking of a pretty girl he had passed on the Pont de la Tournelle, when he found himself all at once face to face with De Lussac. The astonishment of one was mirrored in the face of the other.

"*Ventre Dieu!*" cried the gallant Beauregard. "Why, this is Monsieur le Comte de Lussac!"

"And, unless my eyes deceive me, this is Monsieur Beauregard."

"So they have set you free?"

"Why, yes," replied De Lussac, "or I should not be standing before you here."

If you had put the situation before De Lussac in his calm moments, he would have said, speaking of his own position, "How horrible! In such a position I would be stricken dumb."

Yet, after the first shock of the meeting, he felt perfectly at his ease and, far from being dumb, he was able to converse fluently and rationally.

Beauregard made a clicking noise with his tongue.

"Well, that's astonishing, and I give you my congratulations; for between you and me, my dear Comte, I thought you were badly placed. It is so

easy to get into La Bastille, but so denced difficult to get out. But of course, with De Richelieu at your elbow, things were easier. And how long have you been free?"

De Lussac paused for half a second before making his reply, and Beauregard noticed the pause.

"About an hour."

"Ah, an hour. You have doubtless left your carriage close by?"

"No, Monsieur, I am on foot." De Lussac, as he spoke, turned and began to continue his way across the broad space leading to the Pont de la Tournelle. Beauregard turned and walked with him. The charming lieutenant of Monsieur de Sartines had suddenly for the Comte de Lussac ceased to be a man and had become an obsession, a nightmare, a thing not to be borne.

He stopped dead.

"Monsieur Beauregard," said he, "I must wish you good day."

"Monsieur le Comte," replied Beauregard, "I am walking your way. Let us cross the Pont de la Tournelle together. I have many things to say to you."

"As, for instance—"

"As, for instance, Monsieur, it surprises me to

find you here alone and on foot, wearing a hat which obviously does not belong to you."

"Alia!" said De Lussac, without moving an inch. "You criticize my dress?"

"No, Monsieur, only your hat."

"Well," replied the comte, "let me say that if my hat displeases you, I, in my turn, take exception to you altogether. It does not please me to walk through Paris with a thief-catcher dressed as a noble."

Beauregard flushed red as a lobster.

"That was ill said, Monsieur le Comte. That was ill said. My family is not behind the family of the De Lussacs, and my position as chief under the lieutenant-general of police is not beneath contempt. Ah, Monsieur, it is easy to be seen in your person how the association with the pettifoggers of sedition, the pamphleteers and the canaille rusts the nobility in a man's nature, destroys the gold and brings the brass to light."

"Monsieur," said De Lussac, "you have twice insulted me, all our political differences vanish, this is a matter between you and me. Follow me, Monsieur, or by the living God I will either pass my sword through your heart or chastise you with the scabbard like a dog."

He turned on his heel, and Beauregard, choking in his gorget of gold lace, blind with rage and trembling with passion, followed him under the Porte St. Bernard and then along the Port St. Bernard which lined the bank of the river.

To the left lay the river, where boats were moored to the bank, to the right the vast wood-yards and open spaces, desolate and almost deserted.

De Lussac led the way by the wall skirting these yards till he reached the entrance to them. At each side of the entrance way stood a watch-house, and here a man was always on guard to prevent pilfering from the woodpiles.

When he saw the two noblemen approaching, the watchman left his little box and came and stood in the open, looking at them and evidently wondering what their business might be.

De Lussac took the louis from his pocket and gave it to the man.

"This gentleman and I have some private business to transact," said the comte. "We do not wish to be disturbed, you understand?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" cried the delighted watchman, "'tis not for me to disturb you, my Lord. Beyond those woodpiles there is a big open space, room

enough and sheltered from the port." He glanced at the swords the gentlemen carried, and laughed.

"Come," said De Lussac, and followed by Beauregard he found the place indicated, an ideal spot for the business in hand.

There were no preliminaries; the antagonists simply stripped off their coats, drew their swords, and set to.

Beauregard was accounted one of the best swordsmen in France, but no sooner had the swords crossed than he knew himself matched. De Lussac attacked with the ferocity of a wolf, the cunning of a master of arms and a wrist of steel; the swords clung together, kissed, parted, quarreled; twenty times the sword of Beauregard shot like a ribbon of light toward the breast of De Lussac, only to be deflected by the parrying blade which in its turn attacked only to be foiled and spend its venom on the air.

The quarreling of the steel could be heard by the watchman at the gate, who could tell by the sound the fury of the encounter.

Beauregard, cool up to now, had given no points to his adversary, but now the animal fury of the man broke out; he made a slight fault, saved himself, slipped, recovered, made a terrible lunge which



The quarreling of the steel could be heard by the watchman at the gate

De Lussac parried. Then, while Beauregard was recovering himself, the comte, swift as lightning, got home and drove his rapier through the body of his antagonist, who fell as though struck by a thunderbolt.

The sword had passed through the right side of his chest between the fifth and sixth ribs, disengaging itself as he fell.

He lay with his eyes staring wildly as De Lussac, on his knees, rendered what assistance he could. The comte, instead of endeavoring to stanch the bleeding, which was inconsiderable, wisely contented himself with pillowing the wounded man's head on his coat.

Beauregard, who had closed his eyes, opened them again.

"*Mordieu!*" muttered he. "You have finished me this time. Go, make your escape, but tell the watchman to send for help." He fainted, and De Lussac, hastily putting on his coat, wiped his sword with some grass which he tore up from a patch close by, and returned it to its scabbard. As he did so, a paper protruding from Beauregard's belt drew his attention.

He took it and examined it. It was an order for the arrest of Louis Blanc, the man to whom he had

intrusted the papers of the Society of the Midi.

Now, it was evident what Beauregard's business had been in this quarter of the town. Their meeting had been caused by that law which we might call the Regulation of Interests, and De Lussac, placing the paper in his pocket and casting a last look at the stricken one, hurried from the place, giving orders to the watchman to fetch assistance. He hurriedly returned to the Rue Petit Versailles, warned Blanc to change his residence immediately, returned to the Port St. Bernard, and was crossing the Pont de la Tournelle when a heavy and sullen report shook the sky.

It was the voice of La Bastille announcing the trick that had been played upon her.

CHAPTER IX

LUCK AND DE LUSSAC

THE report of the cannon stopped De Lussac as though a wall had suddenly arisen before him. At that sound every agent in Paris would be on the alert; horsemen were no doubt now galloping to the Hôtel de Sartes with the news. He would have returned and sought a hiding-place in the wood-yards, but that course was now blocked by Beauregard. The place would be swarming with people, and there was nothing to be done but go on and make a dash for the house that Monsieur Blanc had indicated to him; though to reach that house he would have to pass through many streets.

He crossed the Isle des Cygnes by the Rue des Deux Ponts, found the Place Moneils on the opposite bank and just where the Rue des Armes entered the place saw a carriage standing, evidently in waiting for some one.

It was the very same carriage in which he had been driven to the Bastile yesterday by Beauregard,

but fortunately it was not driven by the same coachman. This man who sat on the box, yawning and flicking at the flies with his whip, was younger-looking than the man of the preceding day and altogether different. De Lussac, almost amazed at his own audacity and resource, walked straight toward the carriage, taking, as he went, the order of arrest for Monsieur Blanc from his pocket.

The coachman eyed him as he came, then, seeing that he was coming toward the carriage, he sat up from his lounging attitude and assumed an air of attention.

De Lussac let the man see him reading the official paper which bore the stamp of the Hôtel de Sartes a league off, and even before speaking to the driver he opened the door of the coach.

"Monsieur Beauregard is detained. The man he is in search of has flown. Meanwhile he is waiting. You are to drive me to the Rue de la Harpe, set me down there and return immediately for your master."

"Yes, Monsieur," said the coachman, taking De Lussac for one of those spies of police who at that day were found in all ranks of society and the pay of the ministry.

"And do not spare your horses."

"No, Monsieur."

De Lussac got in, closed the door, and the vehicle started. The Rue de la Harpe was only two streets from the street he wished to reach, and De Lussac, leaning back on the cushions of the police carriage, breathed again freely. The escape of Latude from La Bastille was nothing to this miraculous escape conducted in the full light of day and with the unconscious aid of the police themselves. Not only had he escaped, but he had wrested from his enemies papers that were vital to them. Not only had he captured these papers, but he had placed them in the safe-keeping of the only man who could profitably use them. Not only had he done that, but he had discovered the intention of the government to imprison Monsieur Blanc, and had warned him. His sword had cut every way and always it had stricken his enemies. Luck had helped him, no doubt, but he had also helped Luck.

Such luck does not last without a break, however, and the mettle of De Lussac had still to be put to a test that would have broken nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand.

The carriage had turned from the Rue des Balais into the Rue Pavée, it had passed the Hôtel de Lamoignon and was abreast of the monstrous high

blank wall of the *Filles Bleues* when it stopped. De Lussac looked out of the left-hand window and saw approaching them the agent who had driven them yesterday. He had seen the carriage approaching and signaled to it to stop. Without doubt he was aware of De Lussac's escape and had stopped the carriage to communicate the fact to Monsieur Beauregard.

This would have been the end of all things to most men, but this poet and dreamer so terrible in action, undaunted, flung the door of the carriage open and shut it again, turned on the agent, who was now at his elbow, felled him with a blow on the point of the chin, whipped his sword from its scabbard, and turned on the driver of the carriage, who, bundling off the box, fled toward the Rue des Balais, pursued for ten yards or so by the man with the sword.

Then De Lussac, running back toward the carriage and sheathing his sword as he ran, sprang on the box, seized the reins and the whip from its socket, and started the horses. The whole affair had happened with the rapidity of lightning, but several people who had been in the street were now shouting and running after the carriage; the coward driver had turned and was calling on others to fol-

low him. Speed was De Lussac's only chance, and fortunately for him the horses were as swift as they were powerful. The long stretch of the Rue Pavée that lay before him gave him his chance. He took it at a full gallop, turned the wide corner into the Rue Bleue and found himself out of sight of his pursuers. Then, reining the horses to a swift trot, he headed for the Rue de la Harpe, feeling that victory at last was his.

The precaution that he had taken of closing the carriage door was not the least part of his victory. With a swinging door he would most certainly have drawn the attention and perhaps pursuit of the people in the Rue Bleue.

Ten minutes later he drew up in the Rue de la Harpe, dismounted from the box and, leaving the carriage to take care of itself, turned into the Rue Monis, a narrow street leading directly into the Rue Platrière.

A few minutes later he was pulling at the queasy bell of the house before which we saw Madame Linden interviewing Monsieur Rousseau of Geneva.

CHAPTER X

ROUSSEAU'S DREAM

THE unfortunate Rousseau had spent a most miserable day. He was one of those people who are destitute of the sense of humor, a magnifier of trifles. No sooner had he returned to his house with the packet given to him by Madame Linden and placed it in an old bureau of the room where he worked, than he regretted having mixed himself up in the business at all.

He had mixed himself up with an intrigue, the magnetism of Madame Linden no longer held him, and the deep distrust with which this extraordinary man viewed his fellow-creatures once more had him in its grip.

He sat down in an old arm-chair by the spinet which stood opposite the door of the dusty sitting-room, and fell to considering the position. De Lusac he had known and respected* as a young man, wealthy, of noble birth and fine appearance, who, despite these worldly gifts, had displayed an earnest-

ness of thought strangely at variance with the frank futility marking the thought of the court; but he knew little else about the comte, except that he was an admirer and disciple of Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Unhappy Rousseau! Like many a great man, he had doubts of his own infallibility; he who doubts others becomes a doubter of his own merits, and the distrust he had suddenly conceived for this pupil of his was spreading now to himself.

He felt as a Buddhist priest might feel whose Chelahi has suddenly gone daft and run amuck—without the priest's religious stand-by.

What had De Lussac done? He did not know, and yet he had flung in his lot with De Lussac. Whatever De Lussac had done, it was bad enough in the eyes of the government to result in his incarceration in the Bastile.

The unpractical dreamer in the arm-chair, this visionary who, all the same, in the few pages of *Le Contrat Social* fissured the old world of thought like a ball of glass and freed the dream of man's freedom like a bubble; this giant who was also a child suddenly smote himself a mighty blow on the forehead.

Could Voltaire be at the bottom of all this? The pretty woman, the mysterious packet, the impris-

oned friend: could all this be a plot laid for his ruin by that arch enemy, the brocaded monkey, that *fat François Marie Arctet* or Voltaire!

The thought completed his misery, and just as a child takes to sucking its "comforter" for consolation, so did our philosopher turn to his spinet. He sat down before it and began to play w notes. And now, mystery of the creative imagination! Though his troubles were not forgotten, they had in some magic way opened the doors of that temple of the brain where Music sits and dreams.

An hour later he was seated at the table with some music-paper before him.

Thérèse had gone off for the day, leaving behind her a potato salad for his dinner. At four o'clock, urged by the sensation of hunger, he searched for and found the salad, devoured it and found that he had wrecked the music in his head; fell asleep, and was awakened by the ringing of the bell.

Thinking it was Thérèse returned, he hurried down, and found De Lussac at the door.

It was only when he had reached Rousseau's steps that De Lussac felt the effects of his long fast. He had not eaten that day, and he had gone through adventures sufficient to tax the strongest man.

He almost fell into Rousseau's arms.

"I am pursued," said he, "and, *mordieu!* I can scarcely stand. Shelter me, my friend, and give me something to eat; I am fainting!"

Rousseau, a rabbit a moment ago but a lion now, cast his arm round the comte to support him. He would have defied the whole Hôtel de Sartines, guards, Swiss soldiers, lieutenant-general and all, had they arrived to claim their prisoner. For this sentimentalist, this dreamer, this timorous spinet-tinkler was a man at heart. Always fearful of the things that lay in the future, brought face to face with real danger, called on by real distress, he had no fear.

He led the comte up the rickety stairs, placed him in the arm-chair, and, darting into the kitchen, which was also the parlor, began to search for food. He found a pie prepared by Thérèse for their supper, a bottle of wine, some bread and a knife, fork and plate.

When De Lussac had finished half a bottle of wine and made terrible inroads into the sacred pie, the blood returned to his cheeks and life began for him again.

In as few words as possible he told his tale from the very beginning, and Rousseau listened, astounded and perplexed; he could not reconcile the man of

intellect, the delicate, graceful and gracious De Lussac, with the terrible hornet that had burst from the Bastile, half strangling De Richelieu, striking Beauregard with its sting, smiting and pursuing in broad day the agents of De Sartines, buzzing its victorious way across Paris and lighting at his steps in the resumed form of the graceful and delicate De Lussac.

It was an object lesson in that most difficult subject, man, delivered as if by heaven to this philosopher who had made mankind his study.

"*Mordieu!*" said he, permitting himself for once to swear, "what you tell me sounds like a *conte* by Monsieur Tolbas. And is this Monsieur de Beauregard likely to die of his wounds?"

"I do not know," replied De Lussac. "I trust not. Should he die, however, my mind is clear on the matter. I did it in self-defense."

"Ay, ay," replied Rousseau; "in self-defense, but all the same, he acted from duty. You killed him in the execution of his duty."

"Pardon me," cut in the other. "Do not say 'killed', for I left him still living."

But Jean Jacques heard him not. He had risen to his feet and was pacing the floor, urged by his infernal imagination.

"To kill a man in the execution of his duty is a grave offense. I am not speaking of the human law, but of that moral code which is part of the structure of the human mind—"

"But, Monsieur, I have not killed him; and our quarrel was private; he insulted my hat, I challenged him, and he fell. Such things happen every day in Paris."

"Yes, so do murders and larcenies. Stay; I do not wish to stand in judgment over you. Who am I to do so? But I think, Monsieur, you have been precipitate. In breaking from prison you laid yourself out a course that inevitably entailed disaster to others, if not to yourself. Take, for instance, Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu."

"He is not hurt."

"This Monsieur de Beauregard."

"He will recover."

"The agent—"

"Whom I felled? Oh, *mordieu!* I wager he is even now joining in the hunt for me."

"Take myself. I give you refuge, but in doing so I endanger my own very safety. You have been precipitate, whereas you should have been philosophical."

"In what way?" asked De Lussac, who had risen to his feet.

"You should have remained in his majesty's fortress of the Bastile, and sent for me. I would have seen the king, I would have used my influence; your friends would have helped me—then all would have been well."

De Lussac had not told Jean Jacques of the document which had led to all this trouble, simply stating that his imprisonment was due to his connection with the Society of the Midi; nor did he tell him now.

"Monsieur," said he, moving toward the door, "what you say is true. My presence here is inimical to your safety. I go."

"You will not," replied Rousseau, placing himself before the door. "No, Monsieur, you have cast yourself on my protection, and my protection you shall have. Besides, you have another friend with whom I must communicate."

He told of the Baroness Linden's visit that morning, of the packet she had asked him to keep and of her statement that the packet contained a weapon giving her entire power over the fate of Monsieur de Sartines. As he told this, De Lussac sat down again in his chair. He saw the situation at a glance.

Madame Linden had, indeed, in some miraculous manner, succeeded in gaining possession of the Porcheron paper. He remembered De Richelieu's words, the statement about her visit. Heavens! what devotion, what genius had been working on his behalf! She had risked everything for him: liberty and honor itself.

Rousseau noticed that the young man's eyes had become filled with tears, that his hands were trembling; his lips too.

"Ah, Monsieur Rousseau, Monsieur Rousseau," said De Lussac, suddenly leaning on the table and covering his eyes with his hand. "Philosophy—wisdom—what is it all compared to the love of the heart that never reasons and knows not fear? The lady you speak of, the woman you saw to-day, has given me life and liberty at the risk of her own liberty and life. You have never seen any one more lovely than she, and you will never see anything more beautiful than her act. This packet for which she risked everything must remain in your keeping till she sends for it. I do not know her plans, but I shall know them to-night. If you will give me a corner to lie in till dusk, I will snatch a few hours' sleep, and then I will seek her house. You need have no fear; the weapon she holds protects us all—you who

have given me shelter and I who have craved it. Indeed, I would set out now for her house, only that to enter it in the broad light of day might interfere with whatever plans she has formed. She is doubtless watched."

Rousseau, without a word, led the way into the parlor and pointed to the couch. He shut the door on the young man and returned to the workroom, glanced at the music-paper on the table, and sat down before it.

His mind was very much perturbed; alone now with his fears and apprehensions, he forgot everything but them. At any moment he felt that the police—despite De Lussac's assurances—might arrive, and even more than the police he dreaded the arrival of Thérèse. He could have wept at the mess he had got himself into. Then his mind sought refuge in sound; electrified by the troubles he was passing through, his musical intellect became again abnormally clear. De Lussac, had he not been sound asleep, might have heard the faint tinkling of the spinet, and at dusk, when the comte opened the door of the workroom to take his leave, he found the master seated at the table, with a complete musical manuscript before him.

It was *Rousseau's Dream*, destined to be tinkled forth on every spinet in Europe, begun in distraction, wrecked by a potato salad, and finished in the perturbation of spirit that drives some men to wine and some men to music.

PART III



CHAPTER I

THE CAMPAIGN OF MADAME

MADAME LINDEN, having taken her departure from the Hôtel de Richelieu, drove to her house in the Rue Coq Héron. Her plan of campaign against De Sartines was developing into action with admirable precision.

One might have imagined that her first thought on finding herself in possession of the Porcheron document would have been the freedom of De Lus-sac. She, however, was quite unaware of the sufferings of the comte and absolutely ignorant of the terrors of imprisonment in the Bastile. Her plan against De Sartines included the release of De Lus-sac that evening and it seemed to her that a few hours of imprisonment more or less did not matter. Assured of her power to free him, she put De Lus-sac from her mind. De Joyeuse, Madame de Sten-lis, and Madame d'Harlancourt she had dealt with and punished sufficiently for their petty offenses; De Sartines alone occupied her thoughts. Her

hatred for De Sartines had become during the last hour a passion; that word of insult spoken by him before De Richelieu and the others had completed what his acts had begun. Her heart held no mercy for him.

When she arrived at her house she dismissed the carriage, was admitted by Rosine, and went upstairs calling on the maid to follow her.

"Where is Placide?" asked madame.

"*Ma foi*, where indeed!" replied Rosine. "In some cabaret most likely; he went out at twelve and now 'tis half past two and he has not returned."

"Well, never mind him, but when he returns send him to me. And now to work. My boxes must all be packed, for I leave Paris to-night at ten o'clock."

"To-night, Madame!"

"Yes, to-night; and I give a small reception at eight."

"But, Madame—"

"I know what you are going to say. You need not trouble; there will be no preparations or worry about food. Monsieur de Sartines will provide the entertainment." Madame looked grimly around her, then she went to her bureau and wrote three notes while Rosine stood by waiting.

"Here are three letters," said madame as she fin-

ished the last, folded it and sealed it. "This one is to the landlord, Monsieur de Gorges, telling him I give up the house to-day. Take it to him at once; also this letter to Boehmer, the jeweler, and this to Behrens, the haberdasher; they are to bring my purchases here to-night at eight. Take them. Stay; what is that?"

A carriage had drawn up in the street and some one had rung the door-bell. Madame crossed the room and looked out. She saw beyond the rails of the courtyard a carriage, but the visitor had evidently been admitted, for there was no sign of any one in the courtyard.

"Go," said she to Rosine; "see who it is, and should it by any chance be Monsieur de Sartines, say that I am out."

A moment later Rosine came running up.

"Monsieur de Maupeou has called, Madame, and wishes to speak to you."

"Monsieur de Maupeou? Well, show him up."

Rosine left the room and the baroness presently heard the heavy step of the vice-chancellor on the stairs. The door opened and Rosine's sprightly voice announced: "Monsieur de Maupeou."

De Maupeou, whom we have scarcely seen up to this, was a personage with a funereal air, a face yel-

low as the parchments of the law, and a coat of black velvet worn the least bit at the seams; as if to make up for this touch of business on the coat, his ruffles were of the finest lace and his right hand, half buried in its ruffles, showed the sparkle of a diamond.

Despite the gloom and sobriety of his appearance there was a touch of magnificence about this man, and despite the suggestion of parchment, a touch of fire. Now, at this moment, standing before Madame la Baronne, the president of the law-courts had assumed his most gracious air. He bowed as though he were standing before the dauphiness, and as he took the seat which she indicated he plunged at once into the business on hand.

"Madame," said he, "this morning I received a note indicating that if I called to-day at Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu's house in the Faubourg St. Honoré at one o'clock, I should see something of interest to me as vice-chancellor of France. Also that I was to make no reference to the note but simply call as a friend of Monsieur de Richelieu."

"Monsieur," replied the baroness, "I wrote that note."

"Ah, you wrote that note. Well, Madame, it is

to the honor of my perspicacity that I guessed the fact."

She bowed. "And what you saw—did it interest you, Monsieur?"

"Profoundly."

"That is well. I always like to perform what I promise. Well, Monsieur, if you accept the invitation I gave you to my house this evening, I will promise you a sight even more interesting than that which you beheld at the house of Monsieur de Richelieu."

"Madame," said De Maupeou, "the sight which I beheld this morning interested me mainly by the fact that I did not understand it at all. May I speak plainly?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I saw Monsieur de Sartines in a state of agitation."

"Yes."

"I saw three personages of the court on their knees before a lady whom they hate for her beauty and wit."

"Yes."

"And I heard them asking pardon of her under the pretense of playing a comedy."

"Yes."

"When you invited us all here to-night I was watching Monsieur de Sartines' face. Madame, to be brief, you hold a very high percentage in your hand."

"Again you are right, Monsieur."

"He is your enemy, for 'tis well known, Madame, in the circles of justice that he—hum—"

"Holds me in suspicion. Oh, Monsieur, he has done more than that; he has insulted me three times, and for each of those insults I have sworn revenge."

De Maupeou smiled. "Upon my faith, Madame," said he, "all you tell me exactly confirms what logical reasoning has made me suspect, and now, to be brief again, I do not know nor do I want to know, what act of Monsieur de Sartines has placed him in your bad graces, but this I must know: am I invited to your house to-night in my official capacity or simply as Monsieur de Maupeou?"

"In your official capacity, Monsieur."

"To meet—"

"A criminal who has conspired against the welfare of the state."

"Madame, this is a serious matter, and I warn you if I come to your house to-night, I shall come armed with terrible powers."

"Come armed as you please, Monsieur, only I warn you of this: if you display your power before the right moment arrives you will spoil all."

"Madame," replied he, rising to go, "I leave the matter in your hands, assured as I am that your aim is the same as mine—justice. I shall be with you to-night."

He took his leave, entered his carriage, and gave his coachman the order "Versailles."

His hatred of De Sartines had been a growth of years, one of those hatreds complex as a mechanism and cold as ice, despite the fire that keeps it alive. He knew much against De Sartines, but he had never been able to make use of his knowledge. Instinct told him now that this woman was probably the instrument he had been long searching for. That she had the lieutenant-general of police in her grip was self-evident.

"A criminal who has conspired against the welfare of the state." He kept mumbling the words over as though they pleased him. The criminal could be none other than De Sartines. What crime had he committed out of the many possible crimes that he might commit? De Maupeou could not tell, nor did he care so long as the crime was big enough.

An hour and a half after leaving Paris, that is to

say at about twenty minutes past four, De Maupeou's carriage entered the courtyard of Versailles. We have said that at this period the dinner-hour of the nobility was four o'clock; that of the king five. From this it followed that from four to five o'clock there was an emptying of the anterooms and corridors adjoining the king's apartments. One might have fancied that the dinner-hour would have emptied them entirely, but this was not so. A number of courtiers always clung on in the hope of a glance or word from the king as he passed to the dining-room or the private apartments of Madame du Barry.

Nothing is more extraordinary than this obsession of the courtiers of the kings of France which caused them to cling to the presence of the monarch as bees to their queen. Marked in the time of Louis XIII., it became acute in the reign of the Grand Monarch, and still more so in the time of Louis XV. From the Duchesse de Gramont to the Marchioness de Mirepoix, from Monsieur de Choiseul to the Prince de Soubise, there was not one of these people who did not feel half-stifled when condemned to breathe air other than the air of the court.

So, though it was past the dinner-hour, Monsieur de Maupeou as he passed up the Stairway of the

Ambassadors encountered several of his acquaintances, and more in the Hall of Mirrors.

But it was not to the king that Monsieur de Maupeou had come to pay his court, and disregarding the people whom he met and who made attempts to hold him in talk, he turned his steps toward that wing of the château once occupied by the Princess Adelaide and now occupied by Madame du Barry when that lady was not in residence at Luciennes.

CHAPTER II

MADAME DU BARRY

MADAME DU BARRY on this especial day was in a bad temper, a rare condition of mind with her who, capricious, fanciful, volatile, and changeable as any woman could be, rarely displayed ill-humor.

She was seated now, buried in cushions, in an embrasure of one of the windows showing the trees of the park, a glimpse of the fountains, and a sky of forget-me-not blue broken by pearl-white clouds.

Never does the great park of Versailles look more beautiful than under the afternoon sun of a summer's day, but madame had no eyes for its beauty just now, nor for the antics of Pistache, her little dog, begging to be taken up from the floor, nor for the beauty of Combefère, the macaw, blazing with tropical color on his perch; her eyes were entirely taken up by a paper which she held in her hands. Other papers lay on the cushions, evidently read and cast there in a fit of impatience.

Madame du Barry was dressed in a gown of blue Italian silk, stiff almost as a brocade, clasped at the waist with diamonds, and showing the pearl-white of her throat and arms to perfection. Her hair was dressed after her own fashion, that is to say negligently; the *frisure* and the other horrors of the hair-dresser's art had been condemned by her, and to the terror of the frumps of the court a fashion had been introduced disastrous to all but the young and beautiful. Her face was lovely, one of those faces that surprise as much as they delight us, because they are new.

With what feelings of disgust one reads the description of her by the infamous Madame Gourdan: "Her waist was well rounded; her face, of an oval that might have been chiseled by a sculptor; she had large deep-set eyes whose subtle glance was always delightful, and I noticed that her skin was of marble whiteness, her hands and feet of the daintiest, and her hair in such profusion that I could not hold it in my two hands."

And yet this ogress in her stereotyped way had found something of the countess's nameless charm in those "deep-set eyes whose subtle glance was always delightful."

Madame du Barry raised her head on the intro-

duction of Monsieur de Maupeou, and presented her hand to him while retaining in the other hand the paper which she had been reading.

"Madame—*chère cousine*," murmured the first magistrate of France as he bowed over the hand of the comtesse, "what a pleasure it is to find you to delight the eye, after the dust of the law-courts, the faces one sees. My compliments."

"Oh, Monsieur," replied the lovely creature among the cushions, "how strange it is that you should bring me your compliments, when all day long every one has been bringing me their insults. Read that."

She handed him the paper which was still between her fingers, and De Maupeou, taking it, read:

"Pourquoi ce brillant vis-à-vis?
Est-ce le char d'une déesse
Ou de quelque jeune Princesse?"
S'écriait un badaud surpris.
"Non," de la foule curieuse,
Lui répond un caustique, "non;
C'est le char de la blanchisseuse
De cet infame—d'Aiguillon."

De Maupeou read this elegant production without moving a muscle of his face.

He knew the history of the magnificent carriage

which the Duc d'Aiguillon had presented to Madame du Barry; a carriage which goes down through history as the most beautiful ever built, costing in its construction at least sixty thousand livres.

He had good cause to know the history of this carriage, as when the Duc d'Aiguillon had been accused of oppressing the people of Brittany, De Maupeou it was who had moved the Comtesse du Barry to induce the king to pardon D'Aiguillon. The carriage had been an acknowledgment of this act and the acknowledgment had brought down on the unfortunate comtesse a shower of lampoons and *ballades* of a nature to drive an ordinary woman to distraction.

De Sartines could have easily seized these ballad-mongers, but he held his hand simply because De Maupeou, being at the bottom of the gift of the carriage, De Sartines was determined to make that gift as bitter as possible to Madame du Barry.

It is necessary, to the progress of this story, and it is also interesting, to expose a few of those hidden springs and wheels (in the forms of motives and acts) which made up the every-day story of Versailles.

"Madame," said De Maupeou, "the writer of this rubbish is to be pitied for his poverty of pocket and

mind, and perhaps pardoned for his fault, but the man who allowed this to be written has committed an unpardonable act."

"*Aie!*" cried she, the vision of the pretty carriage in which she could never now drive trundling off into invisibility, "if I but had him I would show him how far it is safe to insult a woman with spirit. And look, here are more, the same, and worse."

"I say again, Madame, that the man who wrote these things is only the pen; it is the man who allows them to be circulated who deserves punishment."

"And that man?"

"Oh, Madame, do you need to ask? Who punished Rochas for his pamphlet against the monarchy? Who punished Therrey for his ballad of Versailles? Who—"

"Ah," said madame, "you mean Monsieur de Sartines?"

"Precisely."

"But, my dear friend, Monsieur de Sartines himself told me that though the things were printed in Paris, the printers had escaped to Holland and were beyond pursuit."

"Oh, did he? Well, Madame, I must ask you a

question: when was the first of these ballads sent to you?"

"Ten days ago, and I have received a ballad a day since."

"When did you apply to Monsieur de Sartines?"

"Five days ago."

"So that five ballads have been printed since, and you will receive another to-morrow. No, Madame, the printers have not escaped to Holland, nor do they wish to escape there; they are quite satisfied to remain in Paris under the protection and in the pay of —" He paused as if he had gone further than he wished.

"You mean to say Monsieur de Sartines is the instigator of these villainies?"

"I mean to say nothing, Madame," replied De Maupeou coldly.

"You hint."

"Madame, I only give you food for reflection."

"It must be. The things have been published daily since I spoke, and he was to have seen me to-day about them, and he has not called. Ah, De Sartines, De Sartines, is that how you recompense your friends!"

De Maupeou smiled; but he said nothing for a

moment, fixing his eyes on the carved mantel emblazoned with the Du Barry arms and the motto: "*Boutez En Avant.*"

In his carriage, which contained among other things materials for correspondence, he had occupied himself during the journey to Versailles in the preparation of a document which he now drew from his pocket.

"Madame," said he, "for every bane there is an antidote, and strangely enough, for the drugs of the poisoner who persecutes you I have brought the antidote." He handed the order to her and she read:

"For our vice-chancellor, Monsieur de Maupeou, to hold this day an inquiry at the house known as No. 12, Rue Coq Héron into the conduct of certain persons under suspicion as enemies to the state. Giving the said Monsieur de Maupeou full power to seize all documents that may cast light on the conduct of the persons indicated, with power to arrest and detain for further examination any person or persons concerning whom, in his judgment, the evidence may direct itself.

"Signed. At our Palace of Versailles."

"Ah," said Madame du Barry when she had finished reading, "can it be that De Sartines—"

De Maupeou cut her short with a grimace. In the mirror opposite to him he had seen a curtain pushed aside and the form of a gentleman disclosing itself at the doorway. It was the king, who had entered unannounced.

"Good day, Madame. Good day, Monsieur de Maupeou. Well, what is this I hear about Monsieur de Sartines?"

"Oh, your Majesty," replied the comtesse, "it is not what we hear about Monsieur de Sartines that troubles me but rather what we do not hear. He was to have called upon me to-day with reference to matters like this"—she handed the verses to the king—"but he has not arrived. He is too busy, no doubt, with the arrest of pickpockets and other high affairs of state to trouble about matters like these."

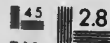
The king read the verses carefully through, for he was very often minute in affairs of that sort, and with every line his irritation deepened. It was not so much the thing itself that angered him as the whole situation. The Choiseuls, the Duchesse de Gramont, the thousand and one bitter enemies of the Du Barry all were conspiring to make his bed of roses a bed of thorns; the ballad-mongers were helping as far as they could.

He flung the thing on the floor with so much ill-



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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1.50

1.56

1.63

1.71

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temper that the favorite forgot her own anger and began to laugh.

"Fortunately, dear France, if we have not a De Sartines to make these gentlemen eat their own words, we have a De Maupeou." She handed the king the order of inquiry which De Maupeou had brought her, and De Maupeou, who knew the king better than she did, cursed inwardly as he watched him reading it, knowing that in his present temper his majesty was impracticable.

What he feared happened.

Having read the paper, Louis handed it back to De Maupeou.

"We will see, Monsieur, we will see. But at present it seems to me there is nothing to be done. It is the men who pay for these things being written rather than the men who write them that we should give our attention to."

"But, your Majesty," said De Maupeou, "it is not against the versifiers that this paper is directed, though indeed it includes them in its net, but a serious conspiracy against the welfare of the state."

His majesty imagined, from finding De Maupeou and Madame du Barry together, that this serious conspiracy to which the vice-chancellor alluded had to do with the tormentors of the favorite. De Mau-

peou would strike them, no doubt, and they would strike back. He did not mind De Maupeou striking them, but he objected to their striking back and all the fuss and fury of a prosecution ably defended. He loved peace, not for its sake but for his own sake.

"Well, we will see. Come to me to-morrow and we will talk the matter over. I am *ennuyé*." He approached the macaw and examined it with serious attention, while De Maupeou, furious, with all his plans paralyzed if not shattered, prepared to go. But Madame du Barry held him with a glance.

"Your Majesty remembers that I have a little dinner-party to-day and a little surprise for my guests in the form of a certain pie."

"Ah, the pie!" said the king, laughing and turning from the bird. "Yes, I remember now the pie."

"Well, your Majesty, since Monsieur de Maupeou is here and since Monsieur de Maupeou is the representative of the law, I would ask him to be present at the inauguration of my pie, since Monsieur de Sartines, the representative of order, is absent."

The king glanced at the severe and serious face of Monsieur de Maupeou and burst out laughing.

"*Ma foi!*" cried he, "an excellent idea. My dear De Maupeou, you must dine with us to-day."

"Your wish is my command, Sire," replied De Maupeou, vaguely uneasy at the hinted mystery of this pie and the manner of the king, but glad, all the same, of another chance to push his request. "But, if I may make so bold to say so, at the inauguration of a novel form of cookery a representative of the law seems to me less called for than a representative of medicine in the form of your Majesty's physician."

"Make your mind easy, dear Monsieur de Maupeou," said the comtesse, "my pie will give indigestion to no one; no one will swallow it, yet it is compounded of one thing that, according to the sages, makes men fat."

"And what is that, Madame?" asked the vice-chancellor.

"Laughter," she replied.

Almost as she uttered the word the door by which the king had entered opened and a servant announced: "Madame la Comtesse d'Egmont."

The daughter of Richelieu belonged to the skirts of the De Choiseul party, that is to say she hated Madame du Barry as bitterly as any one of them, yet was anxious to please the king on her father's account. Hence her presence to-day.

She had scarcely made her compliments to the

king and the comtesse when the servant's voice announced: "Monsieur l'Abbé Frémont."

And before the cleric had fully paid his homage, entered the Comtesse de Coigny, charming, youthful and full of grace, followed by the Duc d'Aiguillon, the Comte de Coigny, and Chon du Barry, exquisite in a robe of *au bord de rivière* green clasped by a great brooch of emeralds at the waist.

They had all been herded chattering in the ante-room till the last moment possible, and now as they stood talking, the king, the Duc d'Aiguillon, the Comtesse d'Egmont, and the Comtesse de Coigny forming one group; the Abbé Frémont, the Comtesse du Barry and the Comte de Coigny forming another, while Chon contented herself with teasing Combefère. As they were talking thus the door suddenly opened and like a thunderclap to De Maupeou, the servant announced: "Monsieur le Comte de Sartines."

This arrival of Monsieur de Sartines deserves a word: When he had left the Duc de Richelieu's house, having given his grace the order of secret admittance to the Bastile, he returned to the Hôtel de Sartines very much perturbed in his mind. He was used to enemies, he was used to traps, he was used even to attempts on his life; but in all his experi-

ence he had never found himself in a position half so grave as the present. He could imprison the woman who held him in her grip, but were he to do so her infernal ingenuity would hit him no less surely; De Maupeou would receive the weapon from the hands of the unknown who held it, and as surely as death is the portion of man De Maupeou would use it.

He sat for a while deep in thought. He could see no possible outlet from the trap that surrounded him. Suddenly he struck himself on the forehead. The king! That was his only chance. He would lay the whole matter before the king and attack De Maupeou before De Maupeou could attack him.

He knew the king so well, that shuffler and evader and double-dealer. He knew that if De Maupeou were to lay a formal charge backed by that atrocious paper, the king would hush the matter up for his own sake, and that the hush-money he would pay De Maupeou would be his—De Sartines'—disgrace and exile. It was imperative to frighten the king, to poison his mind against De Maupeou—nay, even to lie to the king, accuse De Maupeou and Madame Linden of having stolen the paper from De Richelieu. Nay, even better than that, of having concocted the thing and forged his—De Sartines'—sig-

nature to it. The king would know this to be a lie; that did not matter in the least. Before the danger of having his own name implicated the lying king would back his lying lieutenant-general of police.

The king would sacrifice De Maupeon just as readily as De Sartines. It all depended on which of the two got his ear first and frightened him against the other.

He glanced at the clock. It was now half past three. Driving swiftly he could reach Versailles at five; that would be the king's dinner-hour and a bad time for an interview; still, the case was desperate and he could not delay, as it was imperative for him to return to Paris and reach Madame Linden's house at eight. He rang for his horses and in ten minutes was on the road.

When he arrived at Versailles he was received with the news that the king was dining with Madame du Barry. Du Barry! In an instant he remembered—what he had up to this forgotten—that he had promised to call that day on the comtesse with regard to the ballad-mongers! He had promised to call at noon, and he had failed to keep his appointment. Madame Linden had driven it out of his mind.

Again in this duel with the Austrian woman she

had scored; just by the power of obsessing his thoughts she had caused him to make this slip. He stood for a moment balked and furious, though outwardly quite calm. Then, passing up the great staircase, he made for the apartments of the favorite.

The antechamber, crowded all the morning, was now empty of everything but the Chinese jars and mandarins, the hundred and one nicknacks that made the place a curiosity-shop, the palms in pots, the cage of marmosets and a huge lackey on duty.

"Has dinner been served?" asked De Sartines of the latter.

"Not yet, Monsieur."

"Announce me."

The servant cast the door wide open and De Sartines found himself fronting the assembled guests.

He saw the king, he saw Madame du Barry, the Comtesse de Coigny, the Comtesse d'Egmont; the Duc d'Aiguillon, the Abbé Frémont.

All these he saw as one sees the lesser characters in a play, indifferent figures beside the figure of De Maupeou in the circle surrounding the king.

De Maupeou was first.

De Sartines stood for half a moment as though he had seen death.

CHAPTER III

A PIE AND A SURPRISE

ONLY for half a moment. In the next he was bowing to his majesty, and the comtesse, who had turned and was contemplating him with an expression curiously difficult to analyze. Was it derision, was it mirth, was she angry with him, or had she forgotten the broken appointment? The reader of faces, the most astute physiognomist for whom the human face, as a rule, was but a veil of gauze could read nothing for certain in that beautiful face, so capricious, so strangely unmarked by destiny.

“Why, here is order,” cried the comtesse, “come upon the heels of law and the church! My party is complete. Monsieur de Sartines, you must dine with us to-day.”

“Madame, I shall be charmed. Would that I could have arrived earlier but—”

“I know,” she cut in, “you had your literary af-

fairs to attend to. No matter, dear poet, no matter how late, you are always welcome."

Dear poet! So she had not forgotten; not only that, but the words and the manner in which they were spoken told him that she knew of his indifference to the doings of the ballad writers, and he saw in a flash that De Maupeou had been before him not only with the king but with the favorite.

"Madame," said he, taking advantage of the fact that the others had drawn slightly away, "of those scribblers about whom you were speaking to me: I hope that the chief of them—the only one who has not escaped from France—I say I hope that the chief of them will be safely in prison by to-night."

"Oh, Monsieur," replied she, "I hope that will not happen. I do not wish on account of my petty affairs that France should lose so excellent a minister of police as Monsieur de Sartines."

She turned away, leaving this dagger quivering in his heart, and even as she turned dinner was announced and the guests passed into the dining-room, the unfortunate De Sartines bringing up the rear, stricken, speechless, yet showing nothing of his discomfiture in his face.

The dining-room which they entered was very different from that which had once been the dining-

room of the Princess Adelaide. The walls only were the same; upholstered in crimson, with overdoors by Drouais, a Cupid-haunted ceiling from the brush of Boucher, and panel pictures daring in both color and theme by Vien, the place looked exactly what it was: the home of color that paints the human face, impudence that scents itself with patchouli.

There were nine covers laid and, counting De Sartines, ten guests.

When all were seated, De Sartines was left standing.

"Oh, *ma foi!*" cried the comtesse, as the servants hurried to lay a fresh cover, "I had forgotten Monsieur de Sartines. Lubin, place Monsieur de Sartines' chair by the chair of Monsieur l'Abbé, on the left so that the light will not try his eyes. I know you have a horror of a strong light, dear Monsieur de Sartines."

Monsieur de Sartines bowed as he slipped into his seat; he had a poisonous retort on his lips but he dared not utter it.

"Monsieur de Sartines," said the king, who had commenced his soup, "what is this I hear the comtesse saying about your eyes?"

"Only that I am half blinded, Sire."

"Since when?"

"Always, your Majesty, when I find myself in the presence of superlative beauty."

He bowed to the comtesse, who returned the bow mockingly and turned her attention to the Duc d'Aiguillon; she was evidently still unappeased and beyond the reach of blandishment.

"Monsieur de Sartines," said the king, finishing his soup and raising a glass of topaz-colored wine to his lips, "it seems to me there are only two men in my kingdom who have portfolios and yet have the old wit that bites in epigrams and charms in compliment."

"And those two men, Sire?"

"They are Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul and Monsieur le Comte de Sartines."

"O Sire!" cried the minister of police, picking up his spirits, "what you say is false."

"False!"

"There is a third man who is, yet, not a man, beside whom Monsieur de Choiseul and Monsieur de Sartines are blunderers at that game."

"And who is this man who is not a man, pray?"

"A king, Sire."

"*Ma foi!*" cried his majesty, laughing, "it seems

to me, Monsieur de Sartines, you pay that king a doubtful compliment."

"O Sire," laughed De Sartines, amazed at himself and hating himself for having made this *faux pas*, the only one in all his life, "since when is a king a man, since he belongs to the company of those above us?"

De Maupeou, who had been sitting unmolested up to this, cast his eyes up to the ceiling and laughed. De Sartines, the king, and all within the range of the conversation looked up, only to see the fat cupids of Boucher leering at them from the ceiling.

"Um," said the king. He turned to the Abbé Frémont with some inquiry as to the state of affairs in Picardy, from which province the ecclesiastic hailed, while the Comtesse d'Egmont, unable to contain herself, laughed frankly at the face of De Sartines, who, paralyzed by his ill luck, would have given his portfolio for the fall of the ceiling, cupids and all, on the head of De Maupeou.

It was decidedly one of his unlucky days; a moment ago the king had been charming, and now he was out of temper.

The minister of police applied himself to the trout *à la Mayenne* which was before him.

He felt himself isolated by his majesty's displeasure, as indeed he was. The Comtesse de Coigny, to whom he addressed his next remark, replied in monosyllables and the Abbé Frémont was entirely engaged with his fish, while De Maupeou, as if drawing life from the position of his enemy, became less like parchment and almost brilliant in his conversation.

To be frank, some of the conversation was a shade too daring for reproduction in print. That frigid etiquette which at the table of the Grand Monarch imposed silence on all the guests till the king should speak and condemned them to eat only when his majesty set the example, was entirely absent from this dinner-table, where with the first glass of champagne wit took the dullness of license and modesty the wings of wit.

The last course was about to appear when a pause came in the service, which had hitherto been conducted with the precision and ease of a perfect mechanism. One might have thought that some frightful culinary accident had occurred but for the faces of the servants, perfectly unmoved, and the fact that they drew away from their positions behind the chairs of the guests and ranged themselves along the walls of the room.

Scarcely had they done so when the blast of a trumpet sounded from the outside, the door flew open and a figure entered, black as ebony, four feet in height, dressed in crimson brocade and having a wand in its hand. It was Zamore, governor of Luciennes.

Behind the little negro in his absurd dress came a servant bearing an enormous pie.

Madame du Barry clapped her hands, the guests followed suit, and the king looked amused.

"Ah, the pie!" said his majesty. "Monsieur de Maupeou, you have not forgotten the pie which the comtesse promised us?"

"No, Sire," replied the vice-chancellor in a sprightly voice, "nor the promise of Madame la Comtesse as to its contents."

"Then, Monsieur," said the favorite, "in reward for your remembrance you shall have the honor of cutting it. Zamore, place the pie before Monsieur de Maupeou."

The vice-chancellor of France, laughing as though at a secret known only to himself, the king, and Madame du Barry, stood up to the business.

"Place the knife beneath the edge of the crust, and raise the crust in one piece," commanded the comtesse.

The vice-chancellor, knife in hand, bowed to his hostess, the crust tumbled off like a lid and out burst a whirling swarm of cockchafers.

The women shrieked and sprang from the table, a cockchafer hit De Sartines in the eye, half blinding him in reality for a moment. The king, lolling back in his chair, the picture of a fool, laughed till he had to hold his sides, while Zamore, mad with excitement, chased the insects hither and thither, heedless where he went and checked by nothing, not even the skirts of the women.

But the hero of the day was De Maupeou. The insects rewarded their deliverer by swarming on his great wig till he presented such an extraordinary spectacle that even Zamore forgot the chase and clapped his hands.

The vice-chancellor, delightfully solemn under the buzzing swarm, clapped his hand to his wig, seized one of the insects, glanced at it, and let it escape.

"*Mordieu!*" said he. "For the moment I thought I was beset by philosophers!" He advanced to a window that had been flung open, took off his wig, and beat the creatures from it. The servants and the guests, armed with napkins, attacked the remainder, and in a minute not a cockchafer remained.

De Sartines looked at his watch and then at the flaccid face of the king. He saw the utter hopelessness of any attempt at serious business with him; he knew that De Maupeou had the Du Barry on his side and would succeed in whatever scheme he had on foot. He had one move left, and to execute it he must depart at once.

"Your Majesty will excuse me," said he, "but I am torn away by most important business."

"Monsieur, you are excused," replied his majesty, "and tell Monsieur Rousseau—ha! ha!—tell Monsieur Rousseau of the conduct of his disciples, and of Monsieur de Maupeou's remark."

De Sartines bowed to Madame du Barry, who scarcely listened to his excuses, then he left the room. When he reached the hall of entry, instead of leaving the palace, he passed to a little room where, touching a bell, he ordered the servant who answered it to call Monsieur Rappelier. De Sartines had not only the policing of Paris on his hands, but that of the palace of Versailles, which he declared sometimes, with a grim smile, to be a much more difficult business than the policing of the city. The thousands of servants, male and female, of Versailles, the Trianon and Luciennes were forever under the eyes of the forty-five or fifty watch-

dogs of De Sartines, who had also to keep a discreet eye on the thousands of guests and courtiers, the ambassadors and their suites, the couriers who were always going and coming from and to the four quarters of Europe, and the tradesmen who were always ready to fleece his majesty with false weight and corrupt the servants with bribes.

In answer to the summons of the servant, Rappelier, the chief of the agents of safety, made his appearance.

Rappelier had a sinister cast of countenance, a narrow and dark face, a finger wanting from the left hand and a scar on his cheek, which scar, by alteration of color, gave an index to his emotions when they were deeply stirred. His face never altered.

"Rappelier," said De Sartines, "Monsieur the Vice-Chancellor de Maupeou is in the palace; he is dining with his majesty."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"He will leave for Paris very shortly."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"He must not get there."

Rappelier looked puzzled.

"He must not get there till late this evening—say ten."

"I see, Monsieur."

"You must use extra diligence and act at once, you understand."

"I understand, Monsieur. Your orders shall be obeyed."

De Sartines knew his man, his genius and the tremendous powers and means at his disposal. Feeling assured that De Maupeou's journey to Paris was now blocked as effectively as though a granite wall had been built across his path, he left the agent and returned to the hall of entrance.

As he prepared to get into his carriage he looked at his watch. It pointed to twenty-five minutes to seven; then, telling the coachman to take him to Number 12, Rue Coq Héron, he entered the carriage and it drove away.

CHAPTER IV

A BOTTLE AND A BRIDE

DE SARTINES had scarcely left the room and the guests, still convulsed with mirth, retaken their places at the table when the comtesse, who had run for a moment into the adjoining chamber, returned with a pen in her hand.

"The paper," said she as she passed De Maupeou's chair.

Swift as light he plunged his hand into his pocket and presented it to her.

"Dear France," said she, laying the paper on the table before his majesty, "here is the bill for the cockchafers of Monsieur de Maupeou. Receipt it, I pray you."

"The cockchafers?" said the king, casting a leaden eye on the document.

"That pursued him and which he is now about to pursue."

"Aha!" said the king. "I remember."

"Sign."

"I will consider of it."

"The ink is drying on the pen. Sign, for if I have to go for another supply of ink I shall be cross all the evening."

The king, tired with laughter and lazy with wine, re-read the document. He felt sure it was directed against the De Choiseuls and that he would have worry over it, and that if he didn't sign he would have worry with the comtesse.

His mind wobbled between the choice of worry in the future and worry in the present. The amusement De Maupeou had given him and the natural bent of his character made him choose the former. He signed.

The comtesse ran back into the next room and sanded the paper; then she returned and, folding it, handed it to De Maupeou.

De Maupeou, bowing profoundly, placed it in his pocket, then he looked at his watch; it pointed to twenty-four minutes to seven. He had arranged in his own mind to arrive at Madame Linden's house in the Rue Coq Héron at half past eight. By that time her plans, whatever they were, would have fructified, and by that time all the fish would be in the net. So he dallied a little longer in the sun of

royalty, till the king, with whom much laughter did not agree, made a move from the table.

An attack of indigestion was impending, and De Maupeou, having got all he wanted, made his adieus.

He came down the Stairway of the Ambassadors smiling. De Maupeou was terrible when he smiled, for then his face, severe and gloomy, became touched by the ferocity we see in the old Japanese masks. He called for his carriage.

The carriages that set down guests at the great door of the palace waited in the courtyard were the visit of short duration; if of long, the horses would be taken round to the stable-yards. De Maupeou had ordered his horses to be taken to the stable so that they might be fed and watered for the return journey, and as he stood now and waited for them, the chief of the palace-police, Monsieur Rappelier, approached and fell into conversation with him.

The chief of the law and the chief of the palace-police were known one to the other, just as the lord chief justice of England might be known to the chief guardian of Windsor.

They chatted for a few minutes on indifferent subjects, then De Maupeou looked at his watch. It pointed to fifteen minutes to seven.

"Monsieur is waiting for his carriage?" asked Rappelier.

"Why, yes," replied De Maupeou, "and I wish they would hurry with it, as I have to be in Paris by half past eight."

"Oh, then monsieur has still time; it wants twenty minutes to seven."

"Pardon me, fourteen minutes," replied De Maupeou, pulling out his watch and looking at it again.

Even as he did so an usher approached.

"Monsieur's carriage is at the steps."

De Maupeou, saying good-by to Rappelier, turned and, led by the usher, passed to the entrance where, surely enough, his carriage was standing in waiting.

Like De Sartines, he glanced at his watch before placing his foot on the step, and like De Sartines, he gave the address of Number 12, Rue Coq Héron to the driver.

The coach drove away, exchanged the rattle of the paving-stones in the courtyard for the even motion of the wheels upon the well-kept outer way, and, entering the Paris road, headed for the city at a spanking pace.

De Maupeou took from his pocket the paper he had just received from the king and glanced at it.

A few minutes ago the thing had been worthless;

now, with that sprawling signature attached, it was priceless—for the purposes of De Maupeou.

He refolded it, put it back in his pocket and folded his hands.

That De Sartines had committed some frightful indiscretion or crime he felt sure; equally sure was he that the baroness had the evidence of it. He licked his lips at the thought of the paper in his pocket that gave him absolute power over both De Sartines and the woman, should evidence be forthcoming that either of them was implicated, and was on the point of looking at his watch again when the coach lurched, recovered, seemed to shake itself, and then turned over on its side with a crash.

To the occupant it was as though the world had suddenly upset. Half stunned, bleeding from a cut on his left hand, imprisoned like a rat in a trap, he could only shout for help, while the horses, with the pole broken and lying on their sides, engaged the attention of the driver, who freed them by cutting the traces and then, rushing to the carriage door, freed his master.

"*Mordieu!*" cried the vice-chancellor, as he stood at last on the road. "What an escape! But what caused it? I have driven all my life, but never have

I experienced an upset like this. Did you run into anything?"

"Monsieur," said the man, rising from an examination of the wreck, "the linch-pins have been tampered with, and the miracle to me is that we have driven so far without a breakdown."

"How far are we from Versailles?"

"A mile and a half, Monsieur."

De Maupeou looked at his watch. It had stopped. There was not a soul to be seen on the road. It was a beautiful evening, and not a cloud stained the sky that stretched in a bow of azure from the spires and domes of the town and palace of Versailles to the domes and spires of Paris.

A lark was singing above, and the faint warm wind of spring brought the scent of earth and flowers to the distracted vice-chancellor. Nature seemed mocking him.

Having glanced up and down the road in search of help, he fixed his attention on the coachman, who had got one of the horses upon its legs; the other, severely injured and unable to rise, would have to be shot.

"Linch-pins!" said De Maupeou. "Then the wheels have been tampered with?"

"Yes, Monsieur; that I'd swear. Both off-wheels. Ah! the scamps! If I had hold of them!"

"*Cordieu!*" said the vice-chancellor, bending down to examine the wreck.

The thought had come to him that this was the work of De Sartines, done on purpose to delay him. If this were so, there was all the more reason for haste, as the affair must be of the last importance, else the minister of police would not have stooped to such a means.

"*Cordieu!*" cried he. "I must be in Paris by half past eight. My watch is stopped. If I only knew the time! Stay; what is that?"

A puff of dust from the road as it entered Versailles rose on the wind; a vehicle of some sort was approaching. As it drew nearer it proved to be a yellow cabriolet of the type that plied for hire in Paris and Versailles. The horse in the shafts was going at a good pace, and now De Maupeou could hear the little bells of the harness.

"Fool!" said he, thinking of De Sartines. "Unless he meant to kill me outright, he must have known that a vehicle passes along the Paris road every few minutes and that the vice-chancellor of France, with money in his pocket, could not possibly

be detained long by such a simple and silly trick. Fool!"

He used the word again, mentally, as he hailed the cabriolet, which stopped. He did not know in the least, however, that the genius of the piece in which he was now acting was not De Sartines but Rappelier, a much more formidable antagonist and a person, moreover, who thought out a plan to the minutest detail.

In the cabriolet was seated a gentleman with a singularly open and good-humored face, who was being driven to Paris.

"Why, *mon Dieu!*" cried this gentleman, as his vehicle stopped, "here we have an accident, it seems!"

"Monsieur," cried De Maupeou, "I have just escaped with my life. My carriage is, as you see, broken; it is essential for me to reach Paris by half past eight. May I crave a seat in your cabriolet?"

"Why, *mon Dieu!* certainly," cried the other. "Step in, my dear sir, and welcome, thrice welcome. No man can ever say that Jacques Gaillard ever refused a hand, or a seat in his carriage, to the distressed. 'Tis a yellow carriage—I would that it were some more respectable color, but as it is so let

us take it, just so, and, after all, what's in color? In a girl, yes; in a cabriolet, no. Never mind the color. *Vite, cocher!* for my friend in black has to reach Paris by half past seven."

"Eight," said De Maupeou, wondering at his companion's ease and affluence of language, while the cabriolet started, leaving the coachman to do what he could with the broken carriage in the roadway.

"Eight?" said Gaillard. "Well, it does not much matter."

He dived his hand beneath the seat and brought out a bottle, proffered it to his companion, who refused it, took a gulp himself, and returned it to its place.

"Yes, Monsieur," said Gaillard, as though continuing a conversation, "one doesn't get married every day; that is to say, one doesn't make a fool of oneself every day. You understand me perfectly?"

"Ah!" said De Maupeou, perceiving in a flash that his companion was not only drunk but very drunk. "Monsieur then has been married to-day?"

"*Ma foi*, yes," replied Gaillard, making another dive at the bottle as if for comfort.

"And where, may I ask, is madame?" inquired the incautious De Maupeou.

"Madame?" said Gaillard, corking the bottle and

replacing it. "Madame?" Then, as though the question had suddenly reached his understanding, "*Mon Dieu!* where is she?" He glanced around him as if looking for the absent one; then he began shouting to the coachman to stop.

The vehicle drew up.

"Madame?" cried the coachman. "How can I say? I picked you up at the *Couronne*, you and your bottle. You have lost her? Well, that is not my fault."

Gaillard, to the alarm of De Maupeou, instead of replying to this, struggled out of the cabriolet and stood looking about him, up and down the road and across the fields, as if in search of his missing partner.

"She's gone," said he, "but the question remains, where did I leave her? We must return; that is the only thing to be done, decidedly."

De Maupeou, who had clambered out and was standing on the road beside this desirable husband, held up a piece of gold to the coachman, unobserved by his companion.

"And what about this gentleman who wishes to go to Paris?" asked the coachman.

"He can come back and have a drink at the *Couronne*," replied Gaillard. "Then when I have

found my wife we can all go to Paris and have a pleasant evening."

"Monsieur," cried De Maupeou, "what you say is impossible. It is imperative that I should reach Paris by half past eight."

He was furious now, not only at the delay, but at his own position: the vice-chancellor of France arguing with a drunken stranger on the highroad; a nice affair, truly, should it come to the ears of the court.

"Ah!" said Gaillard, his fuddled wits seeming to clear. "I see it all now! You are both of you in league against me. How do I know you haven't stolen my wife, got her away from me, and now you are taking me to Paris?"

The coachman, at this, got down from his seat, furious at the implication, and a battle royal of tongues ensued, while the unfortunate De Maupeou, watch in hand, stood by like the timekeeper of a boxing bout, trying to make peace and failing.

They had lost ten minutes already, and the vice-chancellor was in despair when, from the direction of Versailles, he saw a vehicle approaching. It was the Paris *diligence*.

"Ah!" said he. "Here is the *diligence*. I will take it."

The words acted like a charm. The coachman climbed to his seat again and Gaillard, seeming to forget his wife, took De Maupeou by the arm.

"Get in, Monsieur," said he. "I have lost my wife. No matter. I will find her again, and we can have a drink at Paris. Wives are easily found. Besides, she may have gone on to her mother, who lives in the Rue de Bondy; and I have a bottle in the cabriolet."

De Maupeou hesitated between the choice of Gaillard, who was undesirable, and the *diligence*, which was no vehicle for the first magistrate of France to be found in. He chose Gaillard, stepped into the cabriolet, and was lost.

For several miles they proceeded at a rapid pace, and Gaillard, forgetting his wife, forgetting his grievances, forgetting everything but conviviality, applied himself to the bottle and under its charms sang songs of a free and volatile nature, and presently, losing interest in music, fell asleep.

The horse, as though in sympathy with the wearied reveler, slackened its pace, and the Paris *diligence*, which had been following them and taking their dust, passed them with a tinkling of bells and a cry of derision from the driver.

De Maupeou looked at his watch. It was after

eight. He shouted to the driver to hasten his speed, and that individual replied through the dusk that was now gathering, and whipped up his horse.

The speed increased for a quarter of a mile and then slackened again, despite the apparent efforts of the driver, so that when the toll-gate was reached and De Maupeou looked at his watch he found that it pointed to twenty minutes past eight.

The vehicle stopped at the toll-gate, and the sergeant on duty came to the window with a lantern. The lantern was for the examination of the interior of the cabriolet, for it was not yet dark and De Maupeou could see the sergeant's face clearly in the dusk.

Gaillard, who had suddenly wakened from his sleep, put his hand under the seat for his bottle, and pulled out instead a dead fowl, which he hastily stuffed back.

But the sergeant had seen him.

In a moment De Maupeou and his companion were hauled from the coach and the sergeant, diving under the seat, gave a cry like the cry of a hound.

The compartment beneath the seat was stuffed with contraband!

It seemed to the luckless vice-chancellor that he

was in the midst of a nightmare; dumb at his abominable position and not daring to give his name before all the guards and those loafers who hung around the toll-gates of Paris, he let himself be led into the guard-room, which was fortunately empty, and where he took his seat on the bench beside Gaillard, whose drunkenness had again descended on him like a veil, and who now, relieved from the clutches of the soldiers, sank into a condition of complete oblivion, despite the fact that while being led past the sergeant he had in a perfectly wide-awake manner contrived to slip into the hands of the latter a piece of paper containing a short paper signed "Rappelier."

De Maupeou, unable for a moment to think or form a plan, looked at his watch. It pointed to half past eight.

The sergeant and the soldiery did not know him by sight; these men of the guard-houses had nothing to do with the law-courts or the palaces, and the paper of Rappelier disclosed nothing, containing only a direction that neither Gaillard nor his companion were smugglers, but that they were to be held in custody till ten o'clock and then discharged, and the whole affair reported to Monsieur de Sartines.

Gaillard, let us say at once, was Monsieur Marmontel, that plain-clothes agent of the palace-police whose humor and resource in the case of the mysterious Mademoiselle M. form such an amusing chapter in the memoirs of Monsieur de Condamine.

CHAPTER V

HATS AND COMPLIMENTS

WHILE De Sartines was getting into his carriage at Versailles and De Maupeou was preparing to take leave of the king and the Comtesse du Barry, Madame Linden, standing in the drawing-room of Number 12 Rue Coq Héron, was putting the last touch to her preparations for the evening.

This drawing-room, which opened out of the boudoir, was a large apartment hung with yellow silk curtains and a tapestry representing the doings of Samson. The tapestry, which had belonged to a country house of Monsieur Gorges, the landlord, was a bit too big for the drawing-room of Number 12 Rue Coq Héron; a scene had to be cut out to make it fit, and the scene chosen by Monsieur Gorges for excision, chiefly on account of its extreme freedom of treatment, was the scene depicting the doings of the strong man with Delilah, or rather, one should say, her doings with him.

"Everything is packed, Rosine?" asked madame as she contemplated the room with satisfaction.

"Everything, Madame."

"Monsieur Behrens will be here at eight with my dresses and hats; the dresses will remain downstairs ready to be taken to the carriage, but the boxes containing the hats must be brought up here. I wish to examine them. Show Monsieur Behrens up here when he comes."

"Yes, Madame."

"*Mon Dieu!*" murmured the baroness. "How shall I ever find room for all those hat-boxes in the carriage? They will have to go inside. The rest of the luggage can go on top."

"Yes, Madame."

"That will do, then."

Rosine left the room, and Madame Linden sat down on a sofa, folded her hands, and fell into meditation. Directly De Sartines arrived she would require him to order the release of the comte, despatch a messenger to the Bastille and have him brought directly to the Rue Coq Héron. After that she would use Monsieur de Sartines as he had used her, and worse; she would play with him as a cat plays with a mouse; she would bring him to the

edge of that bottomless pit, De Maupeou, and let him look in; then she would let him go—perhaps.

She was not sure of herself yet, or whether the man's ruin or abasement would please her most. While thinking these thoughts a chilly idea suddenly crossed her mind.

Was it possible for De Sartines to order the release of De Lussac? Had an order of release, like an order of imprisonment, to be signed by the king?

If this were so, the harmony of her plan would be spoiled; she would have to wait till the morrow for the comte's release.

She was considering this point when the sound of the bell below made her start. She listened. Steps sounded on the stairs, and, leaving the drawing-room, she entered the boudoir.

Scarcely had she done so when the door of the boudoir opened and she found herself face to face with De Lussac.

De Lussac, when he left the house of Jean Jacques Rousseau, found that the evening was much lighter than he expected. Rousseau's house with its narrow dusty windows and atmosphere of age and gloom was almost in darkness, but the Rue Platrière was fully lighted. With a few francs,

which he had borrowed from the philosopher, he hired a passing cabriolet which set him down at the corner of the Rue Peysette.

He had now no fear of compromising the woman he loved by going to her house, knowing as he did the weapon she held against his enemies.

For a second they stood, he at the door, she in the middle of the room, as if doubting each other's existence; the next, she was in his arms.

"You are free!"

"I am free, *mordieu*; yes, I am free." He led her to a couch. "Free, unless they catch me again. They arrested me when I left your house yesterday, and I broke out of the Bastille to-day disguised as my kinsman, De Richelieu. But before I tell of myself, tell me of what you have done. Ah, I know! I have heard of your devotion, but tell me of it with your own lips. You have the document?"

She laughed. "Yes, and a frightful price I had to pay for it."

"You—"

"I had to kiss Monsieur de Richelieu."

"You are forgiven," laughed De Lussac.

"I let him embrace me."

"You are forgiven."

"I promised him—"

"What?"

"Never mind."

"But tell me—"

"Tell me first, my friend, your adventures; mine are the adventures of a woman whose only weapons were a kiss and a promise, scarcely worth recounting. Tell me."

He told her briefly but graphically; told her of the prison he had escaped from and its horrors; of De Richelieu, whom he had left half strangled on the bed; of Beauregard, whom he had left half dead in the wood-yard; of the agent of police whom he had felled, the carriage he had stolen, and of Rousseau, with whom he had sought shelter.

Like Rousseau, as she listened she could scarcely believe that the elegant De Lussac, this poet and dreamer, was the man who had done these things.

"So," said she when he had finished, "you are still pursued?"

De Lussac laughed. "By my faith, yes. Not that I care now that, thanks to you, we have De Sartines in our power."

"My friend," said she, "till the game is finished one never knows the ending. Should De Sartines free himself by some master-stroke, you would be set and in a worse position than before, because

your treatment of the Duc de Richelien would be held against you; and should Monsieur Beauregard die, which God forbid, they would perhaps exact your life as payment for his.

"Attend to me. When I start for Vienna to-night you must accompany me on the box-seat of my carriage. Monsieur Gorges, my landlord, from whom I rented this house, has left in the lumber room, among other things, some clothes that belonged to his lackeys. Rosine will show you the room. Disguise yourself, then go to Vaudrin, the livery-stable keeper in the Rue de la Harpe, ask to see the traveling-carriage that is to call for me here at ten o'clock: examine it as a good servant should; test the springs; see that the axles are faultless; and when the hour comes, arrive, on the box. My poor Armand, you must be content to be my servant till we arrive at Vienna."

"I shall be your servant till I die."

"Yes, but not my lackey—"

As she spoke the clock on the mantel struck eight. She rang the bell for Rosine.

"Now you must go, and we shall not meet again till you open the carriage door for me at ten o'clock. There is Rosine; go, my friend, for I am expecting Monsieur de Sartines."

"Monsieur de Sartines?"

"Yes, and Monsieur de Maupeou, and Madame de Stenlis, and several other brilliant people who are much dimmer since I have had to deal with them. Till ten o'clock, then."

De Lussac kissed her hand.

What plan she was about to execute he did not know, but he felt vaguely uneasy, knowing as he did her spirit, her hatred of the minister of police, and the latter's power and capacity for trickery.

He left the room, following Rosine, and Madame Linden, passing into the drawing-room, sat down to await events.

Around her neck, beneath her dress, she was wearing the diamond necklace for which she had paid Boehmer that afternoon. She had also paid Behrens for the hats and gowns which were due now to arrive; everything had been paid for, and all her plans were complete for immediate departure, and as she sat glancing round her at the room which she was so soon to leave, and which she would never see again, she reviewed Paris and its people. Their falsity, and trickery, and coldness, and absolute want of heart; the polished vileness of the court, the brutal misery of the common people, the gilding of the salons and the filth of the streets all

rose up before her, visualized themselves, voiced themselves.

She felt as though she were escaping from Gehenna, and a momentary impulse came on her to send at once for her traveling-carriage and, leaving De Sartines unscathed and her dresses to look after themselves, start at once and put the protecting frontier between herself and these people whom she hated. She had scarcely dismissed this impulse when Rosine appeared at the door.

"Madame, Monsieur Behrens has arrived."

"Show him up," replied Madame la Baronne, "and have my hats brought here."

Rosine vanished.

Madame Linden looked at the clock. It pointed to fifteen minutes past eight. The guests were late, but lateness was a fashionable vice, and she felt no fear of their non-arrival, though slightly disturbed by this want of punctuality in De Sartines.

A moment later Behrens, following Rosine through the boudoir, entered, bowing.

Rosine carried three hat-boxes one on top of the other, and after Behrens came his assistant carrying three more.

The boxes were chocolate-colored and powdered with golden bees.

"Madame," said Behrens, bowing again, as Rosine and the assistant, having deposited their burdens on the floor, left the room, "my compliments."

"And my hats, it seems," replied she with a faint tinge of mockery in the bow which she returned him. "*Ma foi*, Monsieur Behrens, your boxes are so beautiful that one might wear them for hats."

"They are of my own design, Madame," replied the delighted Behrens.

"Your own design? Why, Monsieur Behrens, it seems to me that had you but devoted yourself to canvas instead of chiffon you might have been Monsieur Boucher or Monsieur Fragonard."

"Oh, Madame!" cried Behrens, on whom flattery acted as a powerful light, making him blind to ridicule. "Monsieur Fragonard! Where would he be without my creations? And Monsieur Boucher, who dresses the shepherdesses he copies? I, I alone. And do I copy? No, Madame, I create."

At this moment Rosine appeared at the door.

"Madame de Stenlis."

Madame de Stenlis, wonderful in a robe of lavender and all her diamonds, entered, bowed to Madame Linden and then to Behrens.

"I thought I was early," said Madame de Stenlis, "but I find Monsieur Behrens is before me."

"On the contrary, Madame," replied the baroness, "you are late, and Monsieur Behrens, I am sure, stands behind you as a very faithful tradesman, not as a guest. Come, Madame, you are the first critic in Paris. I leave for Vienna in two hours' time, and I am taking with me some creations of Monsieur Behrens' which you may like to give your opinion upon. Monsieur Behrens!"

"Madame?"

"Let us see what those boxes contain."

Behrens, pressing his forefinger on his lips, stood for a moment contemplating the boxes, then making up his mind which of them he should open first, he produced a hat of lavender with white ostrich feather plumes.

He stood for a moment looking at it and shaking his head.

"In this light, Madame, this hat is almost impossible; however, to get the effect of contour—" He handed it to her, and she put it on.

"Tilted slightly more to the left, Madame."

"So?" asked the baroness.

"Perfectly," replied the hat-artist, "and with the mouth closed, please. It is not a hat of conversation, but designed for occasions of formality when

the wearer is isolated, as when driving alone. Madame de Stenlis will perhaps give her opinion?"

But before Madame de Stenlis could speak, Rosine appeared at the doorway.

"Monsieur de Sartines."

De Sartines had been delayed by an agent who had stopped his carriage at the gates of Paris and given him the news of De Lussac's escape from the Bastille, the loss of the papers of the Society of the Midi, and the fact that Beauregard had been all but slain in a duel with De Lussac.

The news was a terrible blow to De Sartines. With the loss of the papers of the Society of the Midi he had now no hold on Madame Linden, and scarcely any on De Lussac. He came to the house in the Rue Coq Héron without arms, knowing his antagonist was triply armed, but without the least knowledge of how she was going to use her power.

He entered the arena and found her engaged in trying on a hat!

"Ah!" cried Madame de Stenlis as De Sartines bowed to his hostess, "here is a better criticism than mine. De Sartines, your opinion on the confection of Monsieur Belirens."

Before De Sartines could reply, a silvery laugh

sounded from the door way. They turned; it was Madame d'Harlancourt, who had just entered the room, and who had broken into a laugh before Rosine could announce her.

"*Ma foi*, Monsieur de Sartines," cried the comtesse, almost ignoring her hostess, "you have changed your trade then?"

"How so, Madame?"

"From buying consciences to selling bonnets." She glanced around at three hats which Behrens had taken from their boxes and deposited, one on the table, one on a settee, and one on a chair, all waiting to be tried on. "Or are they for exhibition?"

"Exhibition," cut in Madame de Stenlis. "Here is one, and it asks your criticism." She indicated the baroness, who, beautiful and statuesque, the highest compliment to Behrens' art, stood almost heedless of what they were saying, her whole mind engaged in watching De Sartines and the deep anxiety evident in his face and manner.

"Madame," said Madame d'Harlancourt, turning to the baroness and bowing, "my compliments."

"And your criticism, Madame," replied the other.

"Monsieur de Sartines," said Madame d'Harlancourt, "your criticism first."

"It leaves me dumb," said De Sartines, looking at the hat.

"It has that effect, Monsieur; it has that effect," put in the delighted Behrens, walking round the baroness so as to view her from all sides. "Dumb! yes, it has that effect."

"Then I shall always wear it in the presence of fools," laughed she. "Well, Madame d'Harlan-court, now that Monsieur de Sartines has given his opinion, what have you to say?"

"Nothing, Madame."

"Monsieur Behrens."

"Madame?"

"You were right."

"In what way, Madame?"

"It renders them dumb."

De Sartines, sure that all this was a prelude to tragedy and feeling as a man might feel who is being murdered amid millinery, drew close to the beautiful and poisonous-tongued creature who was now gazing at herself in the glass, and murmured, "A truce."

She turned from him without a word to Behrens, who was offering another hat for inspection; before she could take it, however, Rosine's voice came from the doorway: "Monsieur de Joyeuse."

"Rosine," said the baroness as she bowed to the new-comer, "has Placide arrived yet from that business on which I sent him?"

"Not yet, Madame."

"Well, inform me when he does. Monsieur de Joyeuse, I am trying on a hat. Your criticism on it, please?"

"Madame," said De Joyeuse gravely, "it could not rest there."

"And why, Monsieur?"

"It would be so anxious to get at your face."

"Behrens," said madame, removing the structure from her head.

"Madame?"

"My hat has lost its magic; it no longer makes them dumb."

She glanced at the clock as she spoke; it pointed to a quarter to nine. The others, who felt sure that something was going forward behind the scenes, that some mystery lay behind this foolery, stood by watching De Sartines and the woman who was playing this curious game.

She was standing opposite to Behrens, who was holding now in his right hand a plumed and funereal structure, a nocturne, to use his own expression, in his left hand a delicate creation in pearl-gray.

She seemed undecided as to which she should try on, nor had she made up her mind when, like a thunderclap to De Sartines, came the announcement from the doorway: "Monsieur de Maupeou."

CHAPTER VI

COMEDY OR TRAGEDY?

THE vice-chancellor, seated in the guard-room of the toll-gate beside the sleeping Gaillard, had been released by a miracle. Monsieur de Beautrellis, the captain of the guards, making a tour of the toll-gates of Paris that evening and going into the guard-room to sign his report, had instantly recognized and released him. Furious, like a hawk held from his prey and suddenly set free; sure, now, from the trick that had been played him that the game was desperate and that to seize the man he hated and break him he had only to close his hand, De Maupeou *commandered* not only the carriage of Captain Beautrellis, but the services of the captain himself.

Grim, yellow, commanding himself to appear calm, the vice-chancellor bowed to Madame la Baronne and to the guests.

Then he turned slightly, disclosing a form behind him.

"Madame, I have taken the liberty of bringing a friend with me," said De Maupeou. "Monsieur de Beautrellis of the Guards, Madame la Baronne Linden."

Beautrellis, a magnificent man of the type of Monsieur Beauregard, looked around him, saw De Sartines and bowed.

He did not know in the least what was going to happen. De Maupeou had told him something about a conspiracy. If so, where were the conspirators?—for all these people were of the court. He saw Madame de Stenlis, and bowed; he had danced with her only two nights ago. What in the name of wonder was she doing here? He bowed to Madame d'Harlancourt, nodded to De Joyeuse, and then turned his eyes to his hostess.

"Rosine," said the baroness to the maid, who had not yet left the room, "has Placide returned yet?"

"No, Madame."

The baroness glanced at the clock; it was after nine. De Maupeou noticed her anxiety and guessed that Placide—whoever he might be—was a main-spring in her design. He forced himself to be patient, and drawing up to Madame de Stenlis began to talk on indifferent topics, while Madame Linden turned her attention again to Behrens, speaking also

to Monsieur de Beantrellis and Monsieur de Sartes, who were standing near by.

"Gentlemen, you must excuse the presence of so many hats, but a comedy ill-dressed is a comedy ill-acted. Monsieur de Maupeou," raising her voice, "are you a judge of hats?"

"No, Madame," replied De Maupeou, breaking off his conversation with Madame de Stenlis. "My business in life is to judge men."

"Your business is a tragedy, not a comedy, then. Well, at all events, you can give an opinion on an actress's qualification for the tragic rôle. I told you this morning I was about to stage a little play of mine, and upon my heart, Monsieur de Maupeou, I have not yet fixed in my mind whether it will have a comic or a tragic ending. That sounds as though I were an indifferent playwright. I am, and it seems to me that nowadays it is the indifferent playwrights who please. They study their public, not their art. So do I. Monsieur de Beantrellis, what would you advise as an ending for my little play, comedy or tragedy?"

"Oh, *ma foi!*" cried the simple-minded Beantrellis, "I prefer to laugh. Comedy, Madame, by all means. One leaves the theater with a better taste in the mouth and able to cut one's supper."

"Monsieur de Sartines, what do you say?"

"Madame," said De Sartines, who began to see a gleam of light, "in my mind Monsieur de Beautrellis is right."

He bowed profoundly.

"Madame de Stenlis? Madame d'Harlancourt?"

"Tragedy!" cried the two women, laughing.

The baroness, ignoring De Maupeou and De Joyeuse, turned to Behrens.

"Monsieur Behrens, you who dress the actresses of the *Comédie Française*, give me your opinion. Could I act tragedy under that hat of pearl-gray which you are holding for me to try on?"

"If madame is desirous of ruining the effect of the hat and the play, why, yes," replied Behrens. Then, bursting out: "Heavens, Madame! no, a thousand times no! But if madame requires for her play a hat of tragedy—why, here is tragedy itself." He held up the black hat on the point of his finger, and as he did so a knock came to the door. It opened, disclosing Placide.

"Ah, Placide," said the baroness. "So you have returned. Have you got what I sent you for?"

"Yes, Madame," replied Placide, producing a paper.

"Goc l," said the baroness, putting on the gray

hat. "Monsieur Behrens, put tragedy away, pack it with the others. I will travel in this. Monsieur de Sartines, the play of which I spoke to you this morning shall have a happy ending. I retain the manuscript, however. Placide, bring me that parcel."

But, before Placide could move, De Maupeou, who had been whispering to Monsieur de Beautrellis, took a paper from his pocket and presented it to the baroness. Monsieur de Beautrellis took up his position by the door, and the vice-chancellor, calmly walking up to Placide, took the paper from his hand.

Madame Linden glanced at the paper that had been handed to her. De Sartines, who was by her side, glanced at it too.

It was the order of the king.

CHAPTER VII

THE GENIUS OF PLACIDE

THE whole thing had been done with such beautiful simplicity and absence of fuss that the guests perceived nothing of the tragedy at the bottom of it.

The woman on whom the tables had been so completely turned stood by the man on whom she had brought destruction, yet neither of them allowed their emotions to be seen.

Since De Sartines had entered the room that evening, her heart had begun to relent toward him. His broken and anxious look told her that she had been avenged for the slights he had put on her. De Lussac was free, she was victorious. Yet she had decided to complete her lesson, to keep him on tenter-hooks for a while before releasing him.

And now the situation had been swept out of her hands. She had called up a devil and it had appeared. She instantly recognized that De Maupeou was absolutely master of the situation and that De

Sartines was lost. And not only De Sartines but she herself was lost. The document of which De Maupeou was now calmly breaking the seals would strike every one who had to do with it as a thunder-bolt strikes, and more cruelly.

De Sartines, after a momentary impulse to draw his sword and attack the holder of the king's commission, conquered himself and stood unmoved, indifferent, as if bored.

De Maupeou, breaking the last seal of the paper in his hand, flung the enveloping wrapper on the floor and, unfolding the paper it contained, glanced at it.

He was a man who possessed tremendous command over himself. The contents of the paper in his hand would have caused another man in his position to rave and storm, to expose the fact that he had been tricked and fooled to the gaping on-lookers who would have made him in twenty-four hours the laughing-stock of Paris.

De Maupeou simply bent for the wrapper, inclosed the folded paper in it and, advancing to the baroness, handed it to her, at the same time taking the order to the king, which she still held.

"Madame," said De Maupeou, "this paper is interesting as disclosing the state of your mind. I

leave it with you, and with it I take my leave. Monsieur de Beautrellis, may I crave again the use of your carriage? Adieu, Madame, we shall perhaps meet again."

Magnificent in his defeat, he bowed to his hostess, bowed to the guests, and followed by Beautrellis, left the room; while the baroness, astounded, scarcely crediting her senses, with the folded paper in her hand and wild to get at the meaning of it all, turned to her guests.

"Ladies, I must crave your permission for a few words alone with Monsieur de Sartines. My servants will offer you refreshment down-stairs. As for me, starting, as I am, for Vienna in less than an hour's time, I must here and now take my leave of you."

She bowed to Madame de Stenlis and Madame d'Harlancourt who, balked in their curiosity, sneering, yet not daring to cross their tongues with this woman whom they instinctively feared, bowed low, and followed by De Joyeuse gracefully vanished from the room. Their laughter could be heard on the stairs, a safe form of repartee, and in a moment the wheels of their departing carriages came from the street outside; they had not waited for refreshments.

CHAPTER VIII

THE END OF THE PLAY

BEHRENS, who had been engaged in cording the last of the boxes, advanced, bowed low and took his departure, Placide only remaining.

“And now,” said the baroness, “let us see.” She opened the paper.

It was as blank as the palm of her hand. De Sartines took it from her, glanced at it and laid it down. He turned to Placide, but the baroness was before him.

“Placide,” cried his mistress, “what trick is this? What has been done to the paper that I left in the Rue Platrière? Answer! Don’t stand there like a fool!”

“Oh, Madame,” said the old fellow in a grumbling voice, “a story that is half a story is no story. You wish to know everything. Well, then, you shall. I went to the Rue Platrière, as you told me, showed the ring as you told me, received the paper, took it to a place I know of, opened it and

read the document it contained, of which I could not make head or tail."

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried the baroness, clasping her hands at this astounding admission.

"One moment, Madame. Seeing Monsieur de Sartines' signature and putting two and two together, I judged it better to suppress the document and inclose a plain piece of paper. A plain piece of paper never does any harm till it is written upon."

"But the document, the document!" cried De Sartines. "What have you done with it? Oh, *mon Dieu!* if you have—"

"One moment, Monsieur. Having resealed the parcel, I called a cabriolet and took the document to the house of Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu, who was the original possessor of it and in whose possession it now is. Monsieur le Duc is in bed, very much indisposed."

"But, heavens!" cried the baroness, now pale to the lips, "how did you know that the Duc de Richelieu possessed it? How—"

"How, Madame? Why, the night it was taken from the duc's house I journeyed to Paris with the lady who had taken it. I felt it in her pocket. I could have picked her pocket, but I preferred to let things develop. *Ma foi*, Madame, ever since I have

been in your service, I could have ruined you ten times over. As it is, I have guarded you while looking after my master's interests; given you good advice, when I could have given you bad. I have been the mole of the affair, behind the scenes all the time, and I would have brought it all to a conclusion long ago but for that pig Gaussin." Placide swept his hand across his head and his gray hair vanished; with a handkerchief he was holding in his left hand he wiped away the wrinkles of Placide, cast the beard of Placide on the floor, slipped from the overcoat he was wearing and—De Sartines could scarcely believe his senses—there on the parquet before him was standing Lavenne.

"Lavenne!" cried his master.

"At your service, Monsieur."

The baroness, almost fainting from the shock of this metamorphosis, stood holding the back of a chair. She understood the situation instantly, and the fact that this agent of police had been part and parcel of her life, underrunning the whole story of the last week and saving, by a stroke of genius, the man whom she had in a moment of anger brought to the edge of destruction. She waved away the ring he was holding out to her.

His devotion, his common sense, his consummate

acting banished all ill-feeling from her mind. Not only had he saved his master, but he had saved her.

"Monsieur," she said, "keep the ring, not as the gift of an admiring woman to a supreme actor, but as the gift of a friend to a friend." Her voice failed her and her eyes were moist as she turned to the door.

Rosine had entered the room.

"Madame," said Rosine at the door, "the carriage has arrived."

"One moment," said her mistress.

She picked up the blank piece of paper from the floor, took it to the bureau and wrote something on it; folded it, and addressed it; then leaving it on the bureau, she came to De Sartines and held out her hand.

"Good-by, Monsieur de Sartines, unless you wish to keep me a prisoner."

"Madame," replied De Sartines, a world of worry off his mind, "I would much prefer keeping you a friend."

"Good-by, Monsieur Placide. You will find your wages in a little parcel in the top left-hand drawer of my bureau, but you will not find my thanks there, for such a little drawer would not hold them.

"Good-by, Paris." She kissed her hand to the

room around her, turned with a smile to the two men, bowed, laughed with a laugh that had yet a little catch in it, and vanished like a dream.

Rosine came in and removed the boxes. They heard the carriage starting and De Sartines, walking to the bureau, saw a paper there with his name upon it.

It was the paper that had fooled De Maupeou.

He picked it up, opened it, and read: "Order of release for Monsieur de Sartines from the worry of a woman; once his admirer, but now his friend."

He dropped the paper. What did she mean? Had she—had she—? Then he remembered De Lussac. No, it was impossible. The comte had always been her lover.

He came to the window, opened it and stood looking out, watching the lights of the lanterns lining the Rue Coq Héron, and listening to the noise of the streets. It was as though he were looking for something he had lost.

Then he turned from the window.

"*Cordieu!*" said he. "What a woman!"

THE END

